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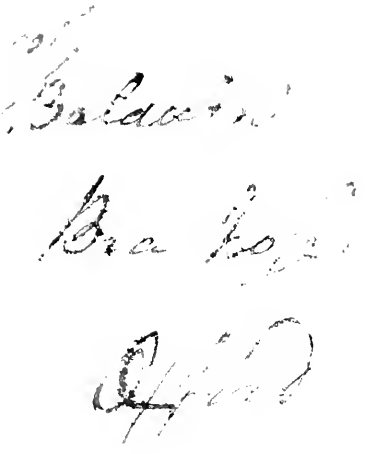

REMARKS

On a Late

PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED,

Chriſtianity not founded on Argument.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

By *JOHN LELAND*, D. D.

AUTHOR of *An Anſwer to Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation*, by Dr. *Tindal*:

AND

The Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament Aſſerted, &c. againſt *The Moral Philoſopher.*

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IT is proper to advertiſe the Reader, that the Letter now publiſh'd, and another which is to follow it, were written by the Author, ſome time ſince, at the Requeſt of a Friend, before he had ſeen any of the Anſwers that have been made to that Pamphlet. After reading ſome of theſe Anſwers, he judg'd it unneceſſary to publiſh theſe Remarks: But as ſome Perſons, for whoſe Judgment he has a very great Regard, were of opinion they might ſtill be of Uſe, he has conſented to the Publication.

ERRAT. P. 8. lin. 31. for *Truth* read *Faith.*

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REMARKS on a late Pamphlet, entitled, Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, *&c.*

SIR,

I Now ſend you, according to your Deſire, ſome Remarks on a Pamphlet that has made ſome noiſe, and which hath a very odd Title, *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument.* It is but very lately that I read it, tho' it be a conſiderable Time ſince it was firſt publiſhed. For, beſides that I live at a diſtance from your great Metropolis, I have ſeen ſo much of theſe Gentlemen's Way of Writing, and have met with ſo little to inform the Underſtanding, or that can be called fair Reaſoning and Argument, that I confeſs my Curioſity is not much raiſed by any thing that appears from that Quarter. But upon your acquainting me, that it was repreſented as a ſubtil Attack upon Chriſtianity, and deſiring my Thoughts upon it, I have read it over with ſome Care. The way of treating the Subject, and the Turn given to Things, is new and uncommon, the Style ſprightly and agreeable; but upon the moſt impartial Conſideration, I cannot think that Chriſtianity has much to fear from this Gentleman, any more than from thoſe that have gone before him.

He has choſen a Manner of Writing, which, it is probable, he ſuppoſed might anſwer his Purpoſe;

but which I think gives one no advantageous Opinion of the Sincerity and Candour of his Mind. He frequently ſpeaks with great ſeeming Regard of our Saviour, of divine Faith, and of the Grace of God and his Holy Spirit. He makes much uſe of Phraſes that have been employed by good Perſons in a pious Senſe; but it is plain, that all this is manag'd ſo as to expoſe Religion and Faith to the Deriſion and Contempt of Mankind. He carries the Ridicule ſo far, as to mix it with his Addreſſes to the Supreme Being. He formally pretends to *offer up his moſt ardent Prayers in behalf* of his Friend *at the Throne of Grace, that God would be pleaſed himſelf to illuminate and irradiate his Mind with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Goſpel; that the ſame Holy Spirit, that firſt dictated that divine Law, would powerfully ſet to his Seal, and atteſt its Authority in his Heart.* With more to the ſame purpoſe *. Now, ſuppoſing what can ſcarce be doubted from the whole of his Pamphlet, that he does not believe the Truth and divine Original of the Goſpel, and that he looks upon the Influence of the Holy Ghoſt to be meer abſurd Cant and Enthuſiaſm, to pretend in a ſolemn manner to apply to God to illuminate him with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Goſpel, and to ſend his Holy Spirit to atteſt its Authority in his Heart, ſeems to me to be a carrying Profaneneſs to a great height. Nor can I well conceive, how any Man that believes there is a Supreme Being, who is a Lover of Truth and Goodneſs,

* P. 112.

Goodneſs, and who concerns himſelf in the Affairs of Men at all, can allow himſelf to be guilty of ſuch a ſolemn Grimace and Mockery.

You may perhaps think this Cenſure a little ſevere; but I cannot help adding, that it appears to me upon the moſt cloſe and impartial Conſideration, that the Tendency of his Pamphlet is to deſtroy all Religion and Reaſon itſelf, and to take from Men all Principles of every kind, thoſe of natural Religion as well as reveal'd. With regard to Chriſtianity, or the Faith of the Goſpel, that it is his Deſign to expoſe it to Ridicule, I think no Man that reads his Pamphlet with any Attention can doubt. It is, according to the Repreſentation he gives of it, ſuch a ſtrange and inconſiſtent thing, that no Man can tell what to make of it. It is a Believing without Underſtanding, without rational Conviction and Evidence; a Believing we know not why, and not only without Reaſon, but againſt it. It is a Faith that has nothing to do with *hiſtorical Evidence* or *moral Certainty*, or with the Scripture-Account of Facts relating to our Saviour; a Faith that *cannot be taught*, and which it *requires no Time to attain*. And therefore no Man ſhould trouble himſelf to look for a Reaſon for believing, or take any pains either to get Information himſelf, or to inſtruct others in the Faith; and I think the manifeſt Tendency of this Scheme, if purſued, would be to baniſh Faith and Chriſtianity out of the World.

But if he endeavours to banter us out of our Faith, perhaps he leaves us Reaſon and natural Religion to guide us. No: this he alſo effectually diſcards.

The Strain of his arguing is to ſhew, that no Religion can be rational, that is not founded on a free and impartial Examination and Enquiry. And at the ſame time, he does all he can to ſhew, that a free and impartial Examination is an impoſſible thing. That the Generality of Mankind are under a natural Incapacity for Reaſoning themſelves, or underſtanding it when propoſed by others, and are incapable of judging if *there be the leaſt of Induction or Inference in the caſe* *. And that the *ableſt and beſt of Men* are *diſqualified for fair Reaſoning* or impartial Judging by their *natural Prejudices*; the Power of which he repreſents to be ſo great, that it *is as abſolute a Diſqualification for ſuch a Trial as the greateſt natural Incapacity* †. From whence it follows, that no Man living is capable of reaſoning fairly or judging truly. He takes a great deal of pains, to ſhew that Reaſon can not be certain of any thing, nor of force enough to controul and govern the Paſſions; that it is ever varying and unſtable, and can never come to a fixed Determination in any one Point whatſoever: And indeed, conſidering the Repreſentation he makes of it, I cannot ſee but that he had as good deny all Men any Uſe of Reaſon or the intellectual Faculty at all; ſince, according to him, it muſt be of little or no advantage, and only tends to perplex Mens Minds with endleſs Uncertainties and Diſtruſts. Accordingly he has choſen to adorn his Title-Page with a Paſſage of *Cotta* in *Cicero*, where he is diſputing againſt Reaſon and againſt Providence; and the Deſign of which is to ſhew, that Reaſon is an uſeleſs and even a pernicious thing. Several

* P. 17, 18. † P. 23.

Several Parts of his Pamphlet ſeem to be particularly levelled againſt what has been uſually thought of great advantage and importance, early Inſtruction and Education. He frequently argues, that if Religion be ſuppoſed to be a rational Thing, it would be a wicked Attempt to endeavour to inſtruct Children in it; for this would be to prejudice and prepoſſeſs their tender Minds, and deſtroy that free Enquiry which Reaſon preſcribes. And as to Faith, they cannot be inſtructed in it, ſince this is a thing that *cannot be taught*, and the Underſtanding has nothing to do with it. All Men therefore muſt be left entirely to themſelves without Inſtruction, under pretence of leaving them to the Grace of God, and to the Guidance of his Spirit. And if this alſo be exploded, as there is great reaſon to think it will, by this Gentleman and his Aſſociates, as unintelligible Cant and Enthuſiaſm; and ſuch it certainly is, according to the Deſcription he gives of it, and which undoubtedly was intended by him to expoſe it to Contempt and Ridicule: I ſay, if this alſo be diſcarded as well as Faith and Reaſon, then I ſee nothing left to guide Men but their Paſſions, to which they muſt be given up without reſerve, and the Force of which he ſo feelingly deſcribes.*

And now we may ſee what a hopeful way Mankind would be in, if they were to follow the Tendency of this Writer's Scheme. And upon what Foundation ſuch Gentlemen as theſe can ſet up for Benefactors to Mankind, who endeavour to ſet them looſe from all Principles, and to ridicule Reaſon

* P. 30, 31.

ſon and Religion out of the World; or what Good they can propoſe to Society or to their Country by it, is hard to ſee. Some others that have appeared againſt Revelation, have at leaſt in ſhew pretended to ſet up Reaſon and Natural Religion for a ſufficient Guide: But this Gentleman gives ſuch an account of Faith and Reaſon too, and plays the one in ſuch a manner againſt the other, that it looks as if it were his Deſign to deſtroy all Regard to either of them, and to ſet aſide all Religion at once, Natural as well as Reveal'd. The manifeſt Tendency of his Performance, is to engage Mankind to give themſelves no Concern about any Religion at all, or to educate their Children in any Principles, the natural Conſequence of which would be a giving them up to Vice and Barbariſm. But it is to be hoped, that when once People are made ſenſible of the Tendency of ſuch a Scheme, it will in a great meaſure prove an Antidote to the Poiſon of it; and that Piety and Good Senſe is not ſo far loſt in the World, that Men will lightly ſuffer themſelves to be banter'd out of their Religion and Reaſon too. Such Attempts, one would be apt to think, ſhould, with Perſons that will allow themſelves time for Reflection, turn to the advantage of Chriſtianity. For it is natural to conclude, that if the Enemies of Chriſtianity are oblig'd to uſe Arguments againſt it, which, if good for any thing, would be equally good againſt all Religion, it is a ſtrong Preſumption of its Truth, and that all Religion muſt ſtand or fall with it. For would any Man in his Senſes, that underſtands Argument at all, or that is in any degree a Judge of good Reaſoning, endeavour to

expoſe

expoſe Chriſtianity by Arguments and Mediums that militate againſt all Religion and all Certainty of Reaſon, if he thought he could attack Chriſtianity with ſucceſs any other way?

The ſame Obſervation may be made with regard to what this Writer ſo often repeats about moral Certainty and Evidence. When Men think they can ſhew that any Teſtimony or Evidence is not to be depended on, or that the Accounts of any paſt Facts are uncertain and to be ſuſpected, the Method that Common-Senſe directs to in ſuch a Caſe, is not to inveigh againſt all Evidence and Teſtimony whatſoever, and againſt all Records of paſt Facts, as if they were all abſolutely uncertain; but to produce Reaſons to invalidate that particular Evidence and Teſtimony, and ſhew why thoſe particular Accounts are not to be depended on. And this undoubtedly is the Method the Enemies of Chriſtianity would take, if they thought they were able to invalidate the Evidence produced for the Goſpel-Records. But inſtead of this, they ridiculouſly fly out into general Invectives againſt all human Teſtimony and all moral Evidence. They harangue pathetically upon the Uncertainty of all paſt Facts, and all Accounts that are tranſmitted to us through the hands of fallible Men; that is, all Records, Laws, and Accounts whatſoever of things which we ourſelves did not ſee. This diſcovers a Conſciouſneſs, that the Evidence for the Facts and Records of Chriſtianity is ſo ſtrong, that they are not able to ſubvert it any other way, than by deſtroying the Credit of all Teſtimony, and all paſt Facts and Records whatſoever. I ſay, we muſt

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe they are ſenſible of this, or elſe we muſt ſuppoſe them to be the very worſt Managers of a Cauſe, the moſt miſerable Bunglers, of any that ever pretended to Reaſon or Argument, which I believe they would be very loth to be thought to be.

Theſe are ſome of the general Reflections that occurred to me upon reading this Pamphlet. But before I proceed to a diſtinct Conſideration of it, it will not be improper to lay before you the Idea this Writer gives of the Nature of that Faith which the Goſpel requires, and for which he pretends to be an Advocate, and of the Principle upon which it is founded, as far as I am capable of forming a Notion of it, by carefully comparing ſeveral Parts of his Book. And this will alſo furniſh a farther Proof of this Gentleman's Candour and Sincerity.

He repreſents *a rational Faith*, that is, as he himſelf explains it, *an Aſſent to revealed Truths founded upon the Conviction of the Underſtanding, as a falſe and unwarrantable Notion* *. And therefore ſets himſelf to prove, that in the Goſpel *no Appeal to the Underſtanding was ever made or intended* †. He talks as if Infants were capable of Faith, before they are capable of exerting any one Act of Reaſon; and that the *Infant's Belief anſwers as effectually all the Demands of the Goſpel, as that of the firſt Proficient, and higheſt Graduate in Divinity* ‡. And as he explains the firſt Beginning of Truth to be without Reaſon, or any Uſe of the Underſtanding, ſo he repreſents the *Perſeverance*

* P. 7. † P. 35, &c. ‡ P. 9, 69, 114.

verance in the Faith required in the Goſpel, to be *a blind and fooliſh Obſtinacy to a preſent Notion, a diſavowing all future Uſe of Reaſon for our Security* *. And ſpeaking of *the true and genuine Faith*, which, ſaith he, *I contend for*, he declares, that that Perſon *beſt enjoys it, who never aſked himſelf one ſingle Queſtion about it, and never dealt at all in the Evidence of Reaſon* †. Agreeably to which, he repreſents that *Zeal* for the *Faith*, which the Goſpel recommends, to be a blind irrational Heat, *a potent Fire, a Zeal not according to Knowledge* ‡. And tho' he obſerves, that we are *ordered to be taught the* Faith *in our Childhood*, yet he expreſly affirms, that Faith and Religion *can never be a thing that is to be taught*, and that it *muſt needs be ſomething that does not require Time to attain* ‖. Accordingly he ſpeaks of Faith all along, as if it were a thing abſolutely completed at once, and which admits of no Degrees; and ſets himſelf to ſhew, that Chriſt and his Apoſtles always required Perſons to believe in an Inſtant, without allowing any time for Deliberation, or offering any Evidence to convince their Minds. *The Conviction*, as he expreſſes it, *was to precede the Evidence* **. And leſt it ſhould be alledged, that the Miracles wrought by Chriſt, and by the Apoſtles in his Name, were Evidences of his Divine Miſſion, he endeavours to ſhew that Miracles could be no Proofs at all, nor were ever intended by our Saviour himſelf as ſuch ††. And finally, he affirms, that the firſt Principle of Faith is really what Philoſophers call *arguing in a Circle, and begging the*

* P. 11. † P. 29. ‡ P. 25. ‖ P. 17. ** P. 37—42. †† P. 46—50.

Queſtion *. According to the Repreſentation he here gives of the Faith which the Goſpel requires, it is not to be wonder'd at, that he repreſents Perſons of the meaneſt Underſtandings to be beſt qualified for Faith, and claims Men of the *brighteſt Intellectuals* on the ſide of Infidelity †.

But this is not all: The Faith required in the Goſpel, according to this Writer's Repreſentation of it, is not only a Perſuaſion without any Conviction of the Underſtanding, or any rational Evidence to ſupport it; but it is directly contrary to Reaſon. He affirms, that there is *an irreconcilable Repugnance in their Natures betwixt Reaſon and Belief* ‡. And endeavours at large to ſhew, that they are *removed at the utmoſt diſtance from all poſſibility of amicable Terms and Reconcilement*; and, as he expreſſes it in the Margin of *Pag.* 81. that *Religion cannot admit the leaſt Alliance with Reaſoning*. And accordingly he aſſerts, that *there is no one Leſſon that the Holy Writings have taken more care to inculcate, than this of denying our Reaſon*; that we are there ſtrictly enjoined to *captivate our Reaſon*, i. e. as he explains it, *to lay it under the moſt abſolute Reſtraint and Prohibition, not to permit it the leaſt Opportunity or Freedom to exert itſelf, or interpoſe on any occaſion whatever* ||.

Such is the goodly Repreſentation this Gentleman is pleaſed to make of what he calls the *genuine Faith* of the Goſpel. And at the ſame time he frequently repeats it, that God requires this Faith of all Perſons under pain of Damnation: that is, he requires them all, on pain of Damnation,

* P. 78. † P. 72. ‡ P. 70, 86. || P. 84.

tion, to believe without Evidence or any Conviction of the Underſtanding, to believe in an Inſtant, and *every Moment of* their *Lives* *, even before they are capable of Underſtanding, to believe without Reaſon and againſt it.

Agreeable to this Deſcription of Faith, is the Account he gives of the Influence of the Holy Ghoſt, which he makes to be the ſole Principle of this Faith. He repreſents him, as working a full Perſuaſion in the Soul, without any Conviction of the Underſtanding, and as engaging Men to believe at once, without knowing why they believe. That he *irradiates the Souls of Believers at once with an irreſiſtible Light from Heaven, that flaſhes Conviction in a moment; and that thus our Faith is completed in an Inſtant, and the moſt perfect and finiſhed Creed produced at once, without any tedious Progreſs in Deductions of our own* †. He calls this a *ſecret Whiſper*, *Inſpiration*, and *infuſed Evidence* ‡. And that it is *a conſtant and particular Revelation imparted ſeparately and ſupernaturally to every Individual* ‖. And this he explains to be of ſuch a nature, as to render all outward Inſtructions entirely needleſs. That there is *no occaſion to apply to Libraries for farther Information*; nor muſt *we be left to take any the leaſt part of our Inſtructions from one another* **. That in interpreting Scripture, *there muſt not be any thing left to the Skill of the Workman* ††. So that all Help of Commentators, Knowledge of Languages, *&c.* is to be diſcarded. For the Holy Ghoſt abides for ever as an *uncorrupted Commentator in our own*

* P. 17. † P. 59. ‡ P. 58. ‖ P. 112. ** P. 60. †† P. 61.

Breaſts *. Yea, the Scriptures themſelves are, according to his account of the matter, entirely needleſs. He oppoſes the inward Atteſtations of the Spirit, to *mere manuſcript Authorities, and Paper-Revelations*, as he calls the Scriptures by way of Contempt. Thoſe that are inſtructed by the Spirit, need not concern themſelves about the *Credit of antient Miracles*, or the *Genuineneſs of diſtant Records*, nor will think any *human Teſtimony* (and this Writer always repreſents the Teſtimony by which the Goſpel-Records are conveyed to us under that Idea) *of conſequence enough to engage a Moment's Attention upon this Subject* †. So that according to his Repreſentation of the matter, a Man that has the Spirit, will not regard the Accounts given us in the Goſpel of the Life, Miracles, Reſurrection, Aſcenſion of our Saviour, and the other extraordinary Facts there recorded, as of any conſequence at all, and will believe as well without them as with them.

He ſpeaks as if all Believers were ſo far under the Influence of the Spirit, as to be rendered infallible. That the Holy Ghoſt, that *great Dictator and infallible Guide* ‡, has *promiſed to abide with us to the End of the World, that we might not be left liable one Moment to a Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition* ||. And he repreſents this Spirit as *ſpeaking the ſame thing to all*, and bringing them *to think all alike* **. So that, according to the Account this Gentleman is pleaſed to put upon us as the Goſpel-Account of Faith, and of the Spirit, all Believers are made to *think all alike*, tho' we plainly ſee they

* P. 61. † P. 59, 60. ‡ P. 56. || P. 60. ** P. 58.

they differ from one another in ſeveral things; and tho' they hold contradictory Sentiments, yet they are all infallibly guided by the Holy Ghoſt, and *not liable one Moment* to be miſtaken.

Thus he places the ſole Foundation of the Chriſtian Faith upon a thing that is evidently falſe in fact, and that is, the immediate infallible Inſpiration of every particular Perſon. And at the ſame time he utterly diſcards all moral Certainty and Evidence, as if Faith had nothing to do with it; that is, the Evidence whereby the Goſpel-Hiſtory, the ſacred Records come down to us. He declares, that this *is indeed the higheſt Degree of rational Evidence that the Nature of the Subject can poſſibly admit of* *; but yet that it is altogether uncertain, and not to be depended on. He often degradingly calls it *human Teſtimony, in its Nature ever liable to Error*; and that it is *nothing more than the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge upon the traditional Teſtimony of a fallible Witneſs* †. That it is a Being *left to the Courteſy of a few Reporters* ‖. And that it is *to us no more than an uncertain Hearſay; the uncertain Aſſertions of fallible Men relating it after one another* **.

Thus have I laid together in one view the Account this Writer gives us of Faith, and of the Spirit, and the Evidence on which Chriſtianity is founded. This is what he calls the *Revealed and Scriptural Account of the matter* ††. And he applauds himſelf for having *pointed out what is really and poſitively the authorized Principle of Faith*; and for having *carried on his Detection of a falſe Principle*

* P. 32. † P. 31. ‖ P. 51. ** P. 52, 53. †† P. 68.

*Principle to a satisfactory Concluſion in the Diſcovery of a true one**. And he declares with an Air of Aſſurance, that the Account he gives *depends not for its Support upon the bare Strength of any ſingle Quotation whatever, but on the joint Tendency and Tenor of the*

I do not think there can [illegible] more complete Scheme of Abſurdity and Enthuſiaſm, than what this Gentleman here puts upon us for the true Scripture-Account of Faith, and of the Spirit, and of the Nature of Goſpel-Evidence; which he undoubtedly intends for expoſing the ſacred Writings, but which, with all equal Judges of things, tends only to expoſe the Unfairneſs of this Writer, and the little Regard he hath to Truth and Candour. But this is the way of theſe Gentlemen, in writing againſt Chriſtianity. They never can allow themſelves to give fair and equal Repreſentations of things, but throw them into falſe Lights, in order to make them appear ridiculous. In any other caſe but this, ſuch a Conduct would ſcarce be thought conſiſtent with common Honeſty. And I know not how to account for it, but that it proceeds from a Conſciouſneſs that they cannot ſucceed againſt Religion by fair Repreſentation and equal Argument.

The Account this Writer gives of the Nature and Grounds of the Chriſtian Faith, is not more abſurd in itſelf, than different from the Repreſentations made to us of it in Scripture. According to him, Faith and Religion is a thing that can *never be taught*; according to the Goſpel, Faith ordinarily

* P. 106. † P. 105.

ordinarily comes by *hearing* and teaching *. According to this Writer's Account of it Faith, is *completed at once*, made perfect *in an Inſtant*, and is not a thing that *requires Time to attain*. But according to the Repreſentation made of it in the Goſpel, Faith may be ſincere tho' weak, it admits of ſeveral Degrees, it is a thing capable of Growth, and which ordinarily takes time and pains for its Eſtabliſhment and Improvement †. Upon his Scheme, all outward Teaching is perfectly needleſs, and Chriſtians are not to receive *the leaſt Part of their Inſtructions from one another*; according to the Goſpel, outward Teaching is neceſſary; Chriſtians are exhorted to *teach and admoniſh one another*. And the Plan upon which the Chriſtian Church was eſtabliſhed was this, that they ſhould be formed into ſacred Aſſemblies, in which there ſhould be Perſons whoſe proper ſtated Office it ſhould be to teach, and in order to this to give themſelves to *Reading, to Exhortation and Doctrine*; and Proviſion was made for a Succeſſion of ſuch Perſons in the Church, who ſhould *be able to teach others alſo* ‖. The Faith recommended in the Goſpel is a Faith that is joined with Knowledge, and whereby the Underſtanding is enlightned **. But the Faith deſcribed by this Author is a Faith without Knowledge, and that has nothing to do with the Underſtanding. According to him, the Zeal for the Faith required of the Profeſſors of Chriſtianity, is a Zeal not according to Knowledge; but in the Goſpel, a Zeal *not according to Knowledge*

* Rom. x. 14, 17. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. † Rom xiv. 1. 2 Theſſ. i. 3. Jude 20. ‖ 2 Tim. ii. 2. ** Phil. i. 9. Col. i. 9, 10.

ledge is diſapproved, and repreſented as not a Zeal of the right kind *. Faith, according to his Repreſentation of it, is a thing for which no reaſon ſhould or can be given. But the contrary is plainly ſuppoſed in the Goſpel, where it is required of Chriſtians as a Duty, that they be *ready to give an Anſwer to thoſe that aſk* them a *Reaſon of the Hope* that is in them †. And it is inſiſted upon as a proper Qualification in the Teachers of the Goſpel, that they *be able to convince the Gainſayers* ‖. As he repreſents it, all Examination and Enquiry is abſolutely inconſiſtent with the Nature of Chriſtian Faith; whereas in the Goſpel, we are commanded to ſearch and try; an eminent Inſtance of which we have in the *Beræans*, who are highly commended for doing ſo; and their Believing is repreſented as the Reſult of their Examination and Enquiry **. According to his Account, the Chriſtian Faith has no dependance at all upon the Miracles or external Atteſtations given to our Saviour, or any of the extraordinary Facts recorded in the Goſpel; but according to the Account given us in Scripture, our Saviour appealed to the Miracles he wrought, as illuſtrious Atteſtations to his divine Miſſion; and the very End for which *theſe Things were written*, was, that we *might by them* be brought to *believe on the Name of the Son of God, and that believing we might have Life in his Name* ‡.

This may give a general Idea of this Gentleman's Performance; and perhaps ſuch a general View of it might be ſufficient. But at your deſire

* Rom. x. 2. † 1 Pet. iii. 15. ‖ Tit. i. 9. ** 1 Theſſ. v. 21. Act. xvii. 11, 12. ‡ John xx. 31.

deſire I ſhall enter on a more particular Examination of it. The Strength of this Pamphlet, as far as it has any appearance of Reaſon or Argument, ſeems to me to lie chiefly in the former Part of it, where he undertakes and ſets himſelf formally to prove, that *Reaſon or the Intellectual Faculty could not poſſibly both from its own Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith* *. This is oddly and not very accurately expreſſed. But his Meaning evidently is, that it is not the Will and Deſign of God that we ſhould make uſe of our intellectual Faculty at all in believing, and that God never intended to lay any Evidence before our Underſtanding to induce us to believe, nor that our intellectual Faculty ſhould at all judge of the Evidence propoſed. This is what he applies himſelf formally to prove, and he ſeems to have a very good opinion of this Part of his Argument, which he thinks he has managed ſo as to render the other Part of his Pamphlet needleſs †.

His firſt Argument reſts upon this Foundation, that Men are required in the Goſpel *to think all alike.* And he thinks it a *prepoſterous Scheme, that of Unity in Opinion propoſed to be effected by Reaſoning* ‖. He makes the ſame Suppoſition in other Parts of his Book, concerning our being obliged or required *to think all alike* ; that is, as he ſeems to underſtand it, to have exactly the ſame Sentiments in all Points in Matters of Religion. But this is not what Chriſtianity requires. The Paſſage that hath moſt of an appearance this way,

* P. 7. † P. 106. ‖ P. 8.

is that of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians: Now I beſeech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no Diviſions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the ſame Mind and in the ſame Judgment* *. But any one that carefully examines that Paſſage and the Context, will find that the Apoſtle's Meaning is not, that it was neceſſary for them to be perfectly of the ſame opinion in all ſpeculative Matters, to which he hath there no reference at all, but that they ſhould ſhun thoſe Factions and *Contentions*, that *Envying and Strife*, and that Party-Spirit that he heard was among them †; and that they ſhould be joined in Unity of Heart and Affection. In like manner, when he prays for the believing *Romans*, that the *God of all Patience and Conſolation would grant* them to be *like-minded one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus, that with one Mind and one Mouth* they might *glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt* ‖; which is another Paſſage referred to by this Writer **: his Deſign is not to inſiſt upon it as of abſolute neceſſity, that there ſhould be a ſtrict Uniformity in Opinion; but that they ſhould preſerve an Unity of Affection, and ſhould all join in glorifying God with one Heart and Mouth, which he there ſuppoſes they might do, notwithſtanding ſmaller Differences. Nothing is more evident than it is from many Paſſages in that Epiſtle, particularly the whole XIVth Chapter, that the Apoſtle is very far from inſinuating, that every

* 1 Cor. i. 10. † 1 Cor. i. 11. iii. 3. ‖ Rom. xv. 5, 6. ** P. 65.

every Difference of Sentiments with regard to any thing in Religion is inconſiſtent with a true Chriſtian Faith. For he there ſuppoſes the Chriſtians to whom he writes to differ in ſeveral things, and exhorts them to mutual Forbearance, and not to judge or condemn one another on account of thoſe Differences. That they that are *ſtrong* ought to bear the Infirmities of the *weak*, i. e. of thoſe that *are weak in Faith*; and that they ſhould be united in Love and Charity, and in a brotherly Diſpoſition towards one another. And this ſeems to be every where the Meaning of that Phraſe, of being *like-minded*, and *of one Mind*, or *the ſame Mind* *. This alſo is what the Apoſtle intends by their *keeping the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace* †. A noble Paſſage, that breathes an admirable Strain of Charity, tho' this Gentleman ſeems very willing by an odd Gloſs to turn it into Ridicule ‖. What he repreſents in a gibing way as a great Abſurdity, is very true, that tho' Men *cannot be all of one Opinion, they may be of one Faith*; that is, *one Faith* in the ſenſe St. *Paul* ſpeaks of it, *viz.* one Faith in the great Eſſentials of it; and, with regard to leſſer Matters, they ſhould, as he there adviſes, *forbear one another in Love*. This forbearing one another, which is ſo often urged as the Duty of Chriſtians, plainly ſuppoſes that there is an Allowance in the Chriſtian Scheme for Diverſity of Opinions in religious Matters. This Gentleman's firſt Argument then fails him, which proceeds upon this Suppoſition, that

* See to this purpoſe Rom. xii. 16. Phil. ii. 1, 2, 3. 1 Pet. iii. 8. † Epheſ. iv. 3. ‖ P. 75.

the Goſpel or the Chriſtian Faith lays Men under a neceſſity of *thinking all alike.*

It is true, there are ſome main Principles, a Belief of which ſeems to be required of all that would paſs for the Diſciples of *Jeſus.* But this is no Argument at all, that Chriſtianity is not founded on rational Conviction or Evidence. There are ſome Principles neceſſary to be believed in natural Religion, as well as reveal'd; and to require any Religion at all, is to require a Belief of ſome Principles, becauſe they lie at the Foundation of it.

But this will come in better, in conſidering the Author's next Argument; which is to this purpoſe:

That in the Goſpel *Queſtions are propounded to us under the Reſtraints of Threats and Authority.* And he thinks it abſurd and contradictory for a Man to be threatned into a rational Belief, *to be talk'd to of Danger in his Deciſions, to have the Rod held out with the Leſſon, and to have Propoſitions tendred to his Reaſon with Penalties annexed* *. This is what he ſeems to lay a particular ſtreſs upon. He frequently takes notice of the Command laid upon us to believe, and the Threatnings denounced againſt Unbelief, as a Proof that Chriſtianity is not a reaſonable Religion.

It is to be obſerved, that in all that he ſaith on this head in different Parts of his Pamphlet, he is pleaſed to conſider Faith and Unbelief as a mere ſpeculative Aſſent or Diſſent to certain Propoſitions, ſeparated from all moral Diſpoſitions and Qualifications whatſoever. Whereas any one that conſiders

* P. 8.

ſiders the Scripture with Attention, will find that this is not the Repreſentation there made of that Faith on which ſo great a ſtreſs is laid in the New Covenant; or of the Unbelief, againſt which ſuch Penalties are denounced. They are ſtill ſuppoſed to be of a practical Nature and Tendency, and to take in good or bad Diſpoſitions of the Mind, which are reckoned as included in the Faith there required, or the Unbelief there condemned.

But there is one previous Queſtion that deſerves to be diſtinctly conſidered, becauſe it ſeems to lie at the Foundation of the Author's whole Argument on this head; and that is, whether the believing any Principles whatſoever can in any caſe be required of any Man as a Duty? This is what he ſeems to deny. He will not allow that any Man can be obliged by any Authority whatſoever to aſſent to any Truth at all, that is propoſed to his Reaſon or Underſtanding. And that it would be the higheſt Tyranny and Injuſtice for God himſelf to require this, even with regard to thoſe Truths that are of the greateſt Certainty and Importance. That it *is impoſſible to conceive any the leaſt Connexion between the Notion of Duty, and aſſenting rationally to any Propoſition, however ſtrongly ſupported* *. This appears to me to be a ſtrange Aſſertion. It is in effect to ſay, that no Man can be oblig'd to it as a Duty, to make a right Uſe of the Reaſon God has given him, nor can God himſelf require him to do ſo. He cannot ſo much as require his reaſonable Creatures to believe and acknowledge his own ſupreme Dominion or Perfections, though founded

* P. 110.

founded on the cleareſt Reaſon and Evidence, nor conſequently to obey and worſhip him. For it is manifeſt, that if a Man may without blame deny a God and a Providence, he may without blame neglect to render that Obedience and Adoration that is due from reaſonable Creatures to the Supreme Being. Thus our Author has found out an admirable Expedient, by freeing Men from all Obligations to believe any Principles whatſoever, to free them from all Obligations to any Religion at all. Whereas, ſuppoſing God has given Men Faculties, by a right Uſe and Improvement of which they are capable of diſcerning Truth, eſpecially in Matters of great importance to their Conduct, and to their Happineſs; then it is both in itſelf fit, and is what God may juſtly require, that they ſhould make a juſt Uſe of their Reaſon and Underſtanding for diſcerning Truth. And if through a Neglect of uſing and improving their Reaſon in a proper manner, they do not diſcern or acknowledge thoſe Truths; then that Neglect or Abuſe of their Reaſon and Underſtanding is really a Fault, and God may puniſh it as ſuch.

What this Gentleman offers in ſupport of his Scheme, amounts to this, that our *Reaſon is ever neceſſitated to determine juſt as ſhe does of herſelf, and is by her nature incapable either of paying Compliments, or giving Offence.* That *the different Light things appear in to different Men, muſt neceſſarily create a different Senſe of things* *. And before this, he had obſerved, that the Determination we come to, is *a neceſſary and independent Event,*

* P. 8.

Event, under no Influence of ours †. Upon this Foundation he aſſerts, that *a Determination either right or wrong, in Matters that are not ſelf-evident*, or in which there is *the leaſt of Induction or Inference*, and ſuch are the moſt important Points of Religion, *muſt be in itſelf equally meritorious* ‡.

The whole Strength of his Reaſoning here depends upon this Suppoſition, that by the very Conſtitution of our Nature, and the Frame of the Human Underſtanding, we may be unavoidably neceſſitated to take Error for Truth, or Truth for Error, even in Matters of the higheſt importance; and that, without any fault of our own, after the beſt, the ſtricteſt and moſt impartial Enquiry and Examination, we are capable of making. But this is a Suppoſition that ought not to be admitted, becauſe it reſolves all our Errors into the Will and Conſtitution of God himſelf; whereas I think it is much more reaſonable and modeſt to ſuppoſe, that Men's Errors in Matters of great importance, are owing to themſelves, to ſome wrong Affections and Diſpoſitions of Mind, ſome Fault in their Enquiry. And their profeſſing the contrary, is no Proof at all; becauſe it cannot be expected, ſuppoſing it ever ſo much their own Fault, that they would be willing to own it to be ſo. But God, who ſearches their Hearts, may know it, and condemn them on the account of it. And where the Neglect of a good Practice follows upon a wrong Judgment flowing from faulty Cauſes, he may juſtly puniſh them both for that wrong Judgment, and for the evil Practice conſequent upon it.

For

† P. 5. ‡ P. 17, 18.

For my part, I cannot be brought to think, that Truth and Falſhood is ſo indifferent to the Human Underſtanding, that we are carried with equal Innocence to believe the one and the other, after the Evidence is fairly laid before us; and this with regard to Matters of great conſequence to our Duty and Happineſs. Since it cannot be denied, that there are ſome Truths of very great importance, that lie at the Foundation of all Religion, and of a good and virtuous Practice; it is as certain, that it is the Will of God, that his reaſonable Creatures ſhould know and believe thoſe Truths, as it is that he would have them practiſe the Duties that ariſe upon the Acknowledgment of thoſe Truths, and to which they are neceſſarily preſuppoſed, *e. g.* It is as certain that it is the Will of God, that Men ſhould believe there is a God that made and governs the World, and that there is a neceſſary Difference between moral Good and Evil, as that it is his Will that Men ſhould worſhip him, ſhould love and reverence him, ſhould ſubmit to his Authority, and obey his Laws, and ſhould practiſe Virtue, and abhor Vice. I cannot therefore think, that he hath ſo formed Men, and given them ſuch Faculties, that even making the beſt uſe of them, and without any fault at all, or wrong Diſpoſition on their parts, they may be invincibly ignorant of thoſe Truths, or may innocently diſbelieve or deny them. And as we may plainly ſee in numberleſs Inſtances, that Mens Affections and Appetites lead them wrong in their Actions, ſo I doubt not they frequently cauſe them to paſs wrong Judgments of things. And any one that knows any thing of Mankind,

Mankind, muſt be ſenſible that they are not determined by mere naked Evidence, but that ſome corrupt Affection, ſome wrong Byaſs of Appetite or Intereſt, which is really a Fault, in many inſtances corrupts and depraves their Judgment; and that this might be guarded againſt, if they uſed all the Care and Pains that is really and abſolutely in their power, and which the Importance of the thing deſerves and demands.

It is particularly certain, that with regard to Truths of a moral and religious Nature, our believing or not believing them, is often very much influenced by the good or bad Diſpoſitions of the Mind, and has a great Effect upon the Practice. And therefore believing in theſe Caſes may be an important Duty, and Unbelief may be very criminal. Nor can I ſee why God may not, as the ſupreme Legiſlator, interpoſe his Authority to require the one, and to warn Men againſt the other. This could not be properly called an arbitrary or unjuſt Proceeding, as this Writer repreſents it, or an erecting a Tyranny over the Underſtanding. To require Men to believe without Evidence, or without a Reaſon for believing, or to believe contrary to Reaſon and Evidence, is unjuſt; but for God to require his reaſonable Creatures to believe, when he himſelf knows there is ſufficient Evidence to engage them to believe, and that it will actually have that effect upon them, if it be not their own fault, and if they carefully attend to it with that Diſpoſition of Mind that becomes them, has nothing in it unjuſt or unbecoming him as the God of Truth, the wiſe and righteous Governor of the World.

For by requiring them to believe in that Caſe, he doth not require them to renounce or give up their Reaſon, or forbid them to make uſe of it; but he requires them to make a proper Uſe of their Reaſon, and of the Faculties he has given them, to lay their Minds open to Conviction and Evidence, and to endeavour to get them clear'd from the Influence of corrupt Inclinations, and culpable Prejudices.

I cannot therefore think, that this Part of the Author's Argument hath any thing in it to prove that Chriſtianity is not founded on Reaſon, or agreeable to it. If God ſhould in his infinite Goodneſs ſend a Meſſenger, or Meſſengers, to bring Doctrines and Laws of great importance to Mankind, as it may be juſtly expected that in ſuch a Caſe he would take care, that they ſhould be attended with ſufficient Atteſtations to convince the World that he ſent them; ſo it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that he would require thoſe to whom this Revelation, with its Evidences, was made known, to believe and to obey it. For to what purpoſe would it be to give a Revelation, and to interpoſe in an extraordinary manner for confirming it with the moſt illuſtrious Atteſtations of a divine Authority; if, after all, it were left to Men as an indifferent matter, whether they believed or received it or not? And to deny that God himſelf has a right to require it as a Duty of Men, to believe and receive what he has revealed, and confirmed by ſuch Evidence, as he who knows the human Mind, knows to be ſufficient to convince honeſt and well-diſpoſed

diſpoſed Minds, is a ſtrange Doctrine, and abhorrent from the common Senſe of Mankind.

Suppoſing Faith to be a Principle of holy Obedience, ſuch a Perſuaſion as forms the Soul to a ſincere Compliance with the Terms of the divine Covenant; and this it may be, and be at the ſame time a rational Perſuaſion; it is highly becoming God to encourage and to reward it. And ſuch is the Faith which the Goſpel requires, and on which it lays ſo great a ſtreſs. Again, ſuppoſing Unbelief brings with it a Diſobedience to the divine Laws, and diſqualifies a Man for the Practice of thoſe Duties which are of great importance in Religion, and without which we cannot, according to the divine Covenant, be entitled to the promiſed Benefits; and that this Unbelief is alſo owing to faulty Cauſes, to bad Diſpoſitions of Mind, and to the Influence of corrupt Paſſions or Intereſts, which pervert the Judgment, and hinder the Mind from a fair examining the Evidence; I think it cannot be denied, that ſuch an Unbelief would be very criminal. Now it is certain, that the Unbelief condemned in the Goſpel, is always ſuppoſed to be of this kind. It is repreſented as owing to bad Diſpoſitions, as the Source and Principle of it, and as attended with Diſobedience to the Laws of the Goſpel as the Fruit and Effect of it. And if God ſaw that this would be the general Caſe of thoſe that ſhould diſbelieve the Goſpel, this would be ſufficient to juſtify the general Threatnings and Declarations there made againſt Unbelievers. And if in any particular Inſtance Unbelief ſhould happen to

be owing to any invincible Impediment or Incapacity, the Supreme Lawgiver will know how to make proper Allowances; for he will always deal juſtly and equitably with all Men. But as the other is the common Caſe of Unbelievers, ſo it is proper the Declarations on that Head ſhould be general, and go upon that general Suppoſition. And if Unbelief be criminal, as upon ſuch a Suppoſition it would certainly be, it would deſerve Puniſhment; and if it deſerves Puniſhment, it is right to threaten it with the Puniſhment it deſerves. Nor would it be unbecoming a wiſe and juſt God to take this way to warn his reaſonable Creatures againſt it, and lay before them the evil Conſequences of ſuch a Conduct. This might be really a Kindneſs to them, as it would awaken their Attention to Truths and Duties of the higheſt conſequence to their Happineſs, and on which the Cauſe and Intereſts of Virtue do very much depend. And if this be an Influence upon their Minds, it is ſuch an Influence as God the Supreme Lawgiver has a right to exert over the human Mind, and which, Reaſon obliges us to own, would be highly proper in ſuch a Caſe.

The next thing this Gentleman offers to ſhew, that the Chriſtian Faith cannot be a rational thing, is, that *we are ordered to be baptized into it.* This he repreſents as *the known Original of Faith, the great Root whence all our religious Impreſſions notoriouſly ſpring*; and that by *the Baptiſmal Ceremony Men commence true Believers at once:* And this, even *whilſt they have not the leaſt Share or Symptom*

of

of Underſtanding *. He ſeems to lay a great ſtreſs upon this, and returns to it in ſeveral Parts of his Pamphlet †. And he obſerves, that *the Infant's Belief anſwers as effectually all the Demands of the Goſpel, as that of the firſt Proficient, and higheſt Graduate in Divinity* ‡.

The Strength of his Argument here depends upon the ſneering Account he gives of the Nature of Baptiſm. But there needs no more to ſhow the Weakneſs and Fallacy of it, than to ſtate the Caſe of Baptiſm according to the Goſpel-Notion of it; in which alone Chriſtianity is concerned. At the firſt founding of the Chriſtian Church, the firſt Work was to bring Perſons over to the Faith of the Goſpel, by ſetting before them the Evidence whereby it was confirmed; and then when they were once converted to the Faith, they were, according to the divine Appointment, to be baptized, which was a ſolemn taking upon them a Profeſſion of the Chriſtian Religion, and a bringing themſelves under the moſt ſacred Obligations to obey its Laws. And there is nothing in this but what is perfectly conſiſtent with Faith's being founded upon good and rational Evidence; nor can ſo much as a Shadow of an Argument be brought from it to prove, that becauſe Perſons were ordered to be baptized after they believed, therefore they did not, or could not uſe their Reaſon or intellectual Faculty to lead them into that Belief. Our Author is ſenſible of this, and therefore he lays the ſtreſs of his Argument upon the Baptiſm of Infants, which he repreſents in his

* P. 9. † P. 65. ‡ P. 114.

his own way. Let us therefore argue with him upon the Suppoſition, that it was the Will of God that not only adult Perſons, who themſelves embraced the Chriſtian Faith, but that their Children too ſhould be baptized. And I cannot ſee how it follows from this, that therefore Faith is not a rational thing. For as to adult Perſons, their being commanded to be baptized upon their believing does not in the leaſt prove that they did not embrace the Chriſtian Faith upon a rational Conviction. And as to Infants, they have no Faith at all; nor does their being baptized ſuppoſe they have any. All that it ſuppoſes, is not that they do themſelves believe, but that they are the Children of Believers; and are by that ſacred Rite entered into the viſible Society of Chriſtians, ſolemnly dedicated to God, and commended to his Grace and Bleſſing by ſuch as do themſelves believe; and who ſolemnly undertake to ſee that they be carefully inſtructed in the Principles of the Chriſtian Faith, when they come to Years capable of it, and that they be trained up to a holy and a virtuous Practice.

So among the *Jews*, no adult Perſon was allowed to be circumciſed, without profeſſing his Belief and Adherence to the Law of *Moſes*; and his being circumciſed, was to be regarded as an open Declaration of it. This was no proof at all, that he did not embrace that Law upon a rational Conviction, but rather ſuppoſed that he did ſo. But when he was himſelf circumciſed and openly profeſſed that Law, his Children, if he had any, were to be circumciſed too; which was not underſtood

ſtood as a Declaration that they alſo believed, of which they were not yet capable; but that they were dedicated to God as the Children of his profeſſed People, and to be trained as they grew up in the Belief and Acknowledgment of the living and true God, and the Practice of his Law.

And ſuppoſing it was the Will of God, that in like manner in the Chriſtian Church not only adult Perſons who themſelves believed, but the Children of ſuch ſhould be baptized, all that could be juſtly concluded from it would be, not that the Chriſtian Faith is not a reaſonable thing, but that the God of Truth and Purity well knew the Doctrines of Chriſtianity to be highly important, and agreeable to Truth and Reaſon; and therefore would have Children betimes inſtructed in thoſe Doctrines; and that he knew the Duties there preſcribed to be of great conſequence to our Happineſs, and therefore would have Children early trained up to the Knowledge and Practice of thoſe Duties. And this does not hinder, but rather obliges the Perſon who was thus early baptized, to conſider thoſe ſacred Truths when he grows up; and then he is not to believe them becauſe he was taught them in his Childhood, but becauſe he himſelf conſiders the Evidence brought for them, and finds it reaſonable and convincing; and in like manner, it does not hinder him from examining into the Nature and Importance of the Duties required of him, but rather obliges him to do ſo, that he may perform thoſe Duties from a full Conviction of their Reaſonableneſs and Excellency.

To

To his Queſtion therefore, *Can a Man be baptized into a rational Religion?* I anſwer, yes. A Man that is convinced of the Truth of ſuch a Religion, and believes it upon good Evidence, may be reaſonably baptized into it; *i. e.* he may ſolemnly, by that outward ſacred Rite, profeſs his Belief of that Religion, and oblige himſelf to the Duties it preſcribes; which is the deſign of Baptiſm with regard to the Adult. And with regard to Infants, it may be very reaſonable for a Man that himſelf believes it upon rational grounds, to baptize his Child, *i. e.* ſolemnly by that ſacred Rite to devote his Child to God, and to bring him as far as in him lies under Engagements to embrace and practiſe that excellent Religion, as ſoon as he is capable of doing ſo; at the ſame time ſolemnly obliging himſelf to take care that the Child be betimes ſeaſoned with the Knowledge of ſacred important Truth, and formed to the Practice of Piety and Virtue. And there is nothing improper, in ſuppoſing that it is the Will and Appointment of God, that Children ſhould betimes be brought under ſuch Engagements, when he knows them to be in themſelves fit and reaſonable, and of ſuch a nature that it will be their Duty and their great Advantage when they come to Years of Diſcretion perſonally to approve and to fulfil them. If this be laying Prejudices and Prepoſſeſſions in their way, it is prepoſſeſſing them in favour of Truth and Virtue; and it is every way agreeable to the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs, to lay them under ſuch a Prepoſſeſſion, and what the Author of our Beings has a right to do. And therefore his doing that, can never be

juſtly

juſtly brought as an Objection againſt the Reaſonableneſs of a Revelation.

THIS leads me to another Argument advanced by this Writer, to ſhew that Faith is not a reaſonable thing, and that is, becauſe we are ordered *to be taught it in our Childhood.* "If the Aſſent "God required were to be a rational one, it would "be highly wicked and unjuſt to prepoſſeſs Men's "tender Minds in any manner before they came to "the full Uſe of their rational Faculties. But now "that we are actually commanded with early Di"ligence to retain our Children as ſo many ſure "Votaries to the Cauſe we profeſs ourſelves; it is "plain that a rational Aſſent is by no means calcu"lated for, or expected at our hands *." He is ſo fond of this Thought, that he repeats it, as his manner is, in other Parts of his Book, where he obſerves, that ſuppoſing Faith rational, "The offi"cious Piety of what they call Education would "be highly partial and unjuſt, and would be no"thing elſe but the undue Cultivation of the moſt "notorious and palpable Prejudices; the anticipating unfairly the Strength of the ſuppoſed E"vidence, *&c.* †."

I muſt own, this way of talking appears to me very extraordinary. That can never be a juſt Argument againſt the Reaſonableneſs of a divine Revelation, which it would be reaſonable to expect, ſuppoſing a Revelation really given. And of this kind is this Gentleman's Argument here. For, ſuppoſing a Revelation really given from Heaven, and that it is in itſelf agreeable to Reaſon, and of

* P. 11, 12. † P. 102, 103.

an excellent Tendency, then certainly the more reaſonable and excellent its Doctrines and Injunctions are, the more proper it would be, and the more for the Good of Mankind, that Children ſhould be inſtituted in it betimes, and trained up in a Knowledge of its divine Principles. For the Juſtneſs of this Conſequence, I appeal to the Experience and Obſervation of all Ages, and to the common Conſent of Mankind, and eſpecially of the wiſeſt and beſt of Men, who have ever agreed that it is a Matter of the greateſt Importance to take care to train up Children betimes in good Principles, and cultivate good Diſpoſitions in them. And if greater care was taken this way than there generally is, there is great reaſon to think that Mankind would be much more generally happy and virtuous than they are.

It is plain to any one that has made juſt Reflections on Human Nature, that the Author of our Beings deſigned that we ſhould be inſtructed in our Childhood. For we are ſo framed and conſtituted, that we muſt neceſſarily depend for the Beginnings of our Knowledge very much on thoſe that are about us. We are in a ſpecial manner caſt by God and Nature on the Care of our Parents. All will own, that they are obliged to take care of the Bodies of their Children; and muſt no care be taken to inſtruct and principle their nobler Part, their Minds? To cultivate the Seeds of Reaſon, and to form them to the Knowledge of ſacred Truth, and to a virtuous Practice? This is what Reaſon, the Good of Mankind, a Love to their Children, and a Deſire of their Happineſs, requires

of

of Parents; and the Neglect of it has been always regarded as a criminal thing. It may be ſaid, this is to prejudice and prepoſſeſs them; but it is a Prepoſſeſſion that Reaſon directs to: And to neglect this, under pretence of leaving them to their own unprejudiced Reaſon, would be to leave their Minds entirely rude and uncultivated, and give them up to Vice and Ignorance. This Gentleman pretends, that according to the Judgment of Reaſon, *it would be a wicked thing to prepoſſeſs their Minds in any manner, before they come to the full Uſe of their rational Faculties.* The plain Meaning of which I take to be this, that they muſt be left without all Inſtruction of any kind, till they arrive to the Age of Manhood. No Attempt muſt be made to inſtruct them in any Branch of Learning or Knowledge, or to put Books into their hands, becauſe Books and Inſtructions of Tutors or Maſters would probably prepoſſeſs them. Every Man muſt be left to find out the Whole of Religion and Knowledge for himſelf, by the mere dint of his own Reaſon and Induſtry. And what would be the conſequence of this, but univerſal Barbariſm? *Our Paſſions*, as this Gentleman obſerves, *are moſt prevalent in thoſe early Years, when Reaſon is leaſt able to form her Judgments in our Aſſiſtance.*—— *They muſt needs have got the ſtart in their Advances, before ſhe can by her Nature have made any conſiderable progreſs in thoſe ſalutary Principles, which are to regulate or ſubdue them. For want of timely Notice, we may more than probably have embarked in wrong Meaſures at ſetting out, and be loſt in the Power of Habit beyond Recovery, be-*

fore we know where we are. All this, and more to the ſame purpoſe, our Author produces *, to ſhew that Faith is neceſſary from the Beginning; from whence, by a ſtrange way of arguing, he infers, that it is not a rational thing, ſince it muſt anticipate the Exerciſe of our Reaſon. But all that it proves is this, that it is neceſſary to endeavour to inſtill ſuch Principles into the Minds of Children betimes, as may be of uſe to correct and regulate their Paſſions and Affections, before they can themſelves go thro' the tedious Proceſs of ſuch an Examination, as he ſuppoſes to be neceſſary to a rational Faith. But it does by no means follow, that becauſe it is proper to inſtruct Children betimes in the Principles of Faith and Religion, even before they are capable clearly of themſelves to diſcern the Evidence; therefore the Principles of Faith are not confirmed by good and rational Evidence, or that the Faith of the Children when they grow up, and can ſee the Evidence, may not become in the propereſt ſenſe rational.

Nor can it juſtly be pretended, that the Prepoſſeſſion of Education takes from a Child, when he comes to Maturity, the Uſe of his own Reaſon, and the Liberty of Judgment. It is ſtill in his power to examine into the Truth and Reaſonableneſs of what he was taught before. And ſurely this will ſcarcely be denied in the preſent Age, when it is become ſo faſhionable a thing to throw off the Principles of Education; and when there are ſo many Inſtances of Perſons, that inſtead of being prejudiced in favour of the Religion in which they

* P. 13, 14.

they were educated, ſeem rather to be prejudiced againſt it, and to be ready to diſcard it for that reaſon; and who, as this Author adviſes *, *explode under the name of Prejudice all the Effect of their Education.*

Another of his Arguments to prove that the Chriſtian Faith is not a rational one, is drawn from the Nature of Examination and Enquiry. The Strain of his Reaſoning is to this purpoſe; that Reaſon requires us to examine before we believe, whereas the Faith required in the Goſpel is abſolutely inconſiſtent with a fair Examination. He obſerves, that "there is not one ſingle Argument from "Reaſon, why a Man ſhould not return of courſe "to Neutrality, the firſt Moment he begins to "think for himſelf. That nothing is more evi"dent, than that to examine fairly, we muſt "come unprejudiced and indifferent to the Exami"nation. Examination in the very Term implies "a Suſpenſe of Conviction; and therefore if Reli"gion admits at all of Examination, it muſt ne"ceſſarily admit likewiſe of (at leaſt a temporary) "Diſbelief. The rational Chriſtian, whoever he "be, muſt of courſe have originally ſet out a Scep"tick——and that a Man may, nay muſt, diſ"believe a while for Information's ſake——." And yet all Doubting and Diſbelief is what the Goſpel condemns †. The Author had ſaid the ſame thing before ‖, and he returns to it in ſeveral Parts of his Pamphlet.

But the whole of his Reaſoning here proceeds upon a wrong Foundation, *viz.* that all Examination

* P. 9. † P. 12, 13. ‖ P. 5, 6.

tion neceſſarily ſuppoſes a perfect Neutrality or Indifferency of Mind, and a temporary Diſbelief. It is manifeſt, that in examining into the Truth of Facts, it is not neceſſary that we have an abſolute Doubt of thoſe Facts, or be perfectly neutral and indifferent about them, before we enter on a particular Examination. It is very uſual to examine into Facts that we were pretty ſure of in general before, and yet this may not hinder the Examination and Enquiry from being juſt and exact. And the ſame may alſo hold, with regard to Doctrines and Principles. It is not at all neceſſary to a fair Examination of Principles, that a Man be perfectly neutral and indifferent to them when he begins the Enquiry, or that he ſhould actually diſbelieve them. In many caſes this would be unreaſonable, in ſome ſcarce poſſible, except the Things he enquires or examines into are Things which he never heard of before. For if he enquires, *e. g.* into Doctrines or Principles in which he had been carefully educated and inſtructed, and when inſtructed had Reaſons given him, which appeared to him good and ſufficient; it would be abſurd to ſuppoſe that he ſhould not be influenced by thoſe Reaſons, till he ſaw cauſe to alter his Sentiments. For it would be as irrational to diſbelieve the Principles in which a Man was educated, for no other Reaſon, but becauſe he was educated in them; as it would be, to believe them merely for that Reaſon. When a Man has reaſon to believe a Thing, and no ſufficient Reaſon that he yet knows of to the contrary, it would be unreaſonable entirely to ſuſpend his Aſſent

Aſſent to it, merely becauſe it is poſſible to be falſe, tho' he has no reaſon to think it ſo.

A Man may enter upon an Enquiry with a Belief that what he enquires into is true, or at leaſt very probable, for the Reaſons which have been given him; but yet with a Reſolution to examine more cloſely, and ſearch more narrowly into the Validity of thoſe Reaſons and Evidences. And it is ſufficient to a fair Examination, that he applies himſelf to it with a Mind honeſtly prepared and diſpoſed to receive and ſubmit to whatever Evidence ſhall ariſe in the Courſe of the Examination or Enquiry. This is all the *Neutrality*, if this Gentleman will call it ſo, that is neceſſary to a fair Enquiry, *viz.* a Diſpoſition or Reſolution to embrace Truth, on which ſide ſoever it ſhall upon a careful Search appear; and this Neutrality may be where a Man at preſent thinks he has much more reaſon to believe, than the contrary. All the Doubt that is ſtrictly and abſolutely neceſſary to a fair Examination is, that it is poſſible what he enquires into may be otherwiſe than he at preſent apprehends it. But a Man may believe a thing poſſible to be falſe, and yet have great reaſon to believe it true. And it may well happen, that in the Courſe of his Examination, he may ſee ſtill greater Reaſon to believe and be aſſured of what he thought at firſt only probable. In which caſe, the Examination may be carried on very fairly, *i. e.* with a Mind open to Conviction and Evidence, without entertaining any conſiderable Doubt, or ever once ſeeing cauſe abſolutely to ſuſpend the Aſſent concerning it. Thus, *e. g.* if a Man has been carefully educated

cated in the Belief of a God, and of a Providence, and the moral Differences of Things, and at the ſame time has been inſtructed in the Reaſons upon which theſe Principles are founded, it is not neceſſary to a fair Examination into thoſe Principles, that he ſhould be perfectly indifferent with regard to them, or ſhould diſbelieve them; he may very conſiſtently carry on an Examination and Enquiry, without having his Belief of them ſhocked either in the Beginning or whole Progreſs of it, becauſe as he goes on in the Examination, the Evidence may riſe fuller to his view, and his Convictions may grow ſtronger. And I doubt not this hath alſo been the caſe of many excellent Perſons of great Abilities and Probity, and of free Judgments, who have examined the Evidences for Chriſtianity. They have come to the Examination with a good Opinion of it at firſt, but yet with a Reſolution impartially to conſider and follow the Evidence that ſhould ariſe; and the more they examined, the more they found reaſon to believe it; and therefore were never obliged during their Examination abſolutely to ſuſpend their Aſſent to it, or to refuſe to govern their Practice by its Precepts.

There is no need therefore to ſuppoſe with this Writer, that all the Time of Examination and Enquiry muſt be an *infidel Interim*, as he calls it*, or to talk of the Danger of Death's coming upon us whilſt we are carrying on this Enquiry, and of our lacking Faith the *neceſſary Paſſport*, &c. For a Perſon may fairly carry on the Enquiry, and yet neither during all that time diſbelieve the Principles,

* P. 17.

ciples, nor neglect the Practice of the Duties of Chriſtianity; yea, may ſtill have his Faith more ſtrengthned as he goes on, and his Reſolutions more eſtabliſhed for a Chriſtian Practice.

We may ſee by this, how juſt this Gentleman's Inſinuations are, as if all Enquiries and *Diſquiſitions into the Truth and Authentickneſs of Revelation were Practices utterly inconſiſtent with the Pretenſions of ſuch as call themſelves Chriſtians, or expect any Benefit from the Goſpel-Covenant, to which they are always preſumed Parties* *. For ſuppoſing God hath given us a Revelation, which he knows is attended with ſufficient Evidence to ſatisfy a reaſonable and well-diſpoſed Mind, he may very conſiſtently require us both to examine and to believe it; becauſe he knows a firm Belief of it will be the Effect of a fair Examination, if it be not our own faults. His Deſign may be in effect this: Examine fairly and carefully, and you will ſee ſuch Evidences of its Truth and Excellency, as will make your Belief and Obedience a reaſonable Service.

Nor can I ſee but a Parent who takes great care and pains in training up his Child to juſt and worthy Sentiments of Religion and Virtue, may very conſiſtently bid him examine and enquire when he grows up, without deſiring him to diſbelieve what he has taught him. There would be nothing abſurd in his addreſſing him thus: I have endeavoured to inſtruct you in the Reaſonableneſs of the Principles of Religion, as far as I was able to do it; and now you are come to a Capa-

* P. 16.

city of judging for yourſelf, I recommend it to you, to examine thoſe things, and the Reaſons and Evidences on which they are founded, with a Mind open to Evidence and a Love of Truth; and am perſuaded that the more you do ſo, the more you will be convinced of their Reaſonableneſs and Excellency. This is a way of recommending Enquiry and Examination perfectly conſiſtent with a firm Belief of the Truth of the Things enquir'd into; nor is there any thing unreaſonable in ſuch a Proceeding.

Having conſidered this Gentleman's Account of the Nature of Examination and Enquiry, it will be no hard matter to ſhew the Weakneſs and Fallacy of the Argument he builds upon it. He firſt ſuppoſes, that *a Man may, nay muſt, diſbelieve a while for Information's ſake,* and then aſks, *Why may he not even diſbelieve for ever, for want of Information? And if Doubting be once allowable, who ſhall aſcertain the preciſe time for ſumming up the Evidence, and pronouncing Sentence?* He ſuppoſes that, according to the *Scheme* of thoſe that are for a rational Faith, *the firſt Motions of Doubt are neceſſary Preparations, and therefore not in themſelves criminal.* And then he aſks, *By what Authority (if the Evidence happens never to take effect) can a Man be obliged ever to be reſolved* *? I ſee no other Tendency in this way of talking, but to promote univerſal Scepticiſm. But the Foundation of it has been ſhewn to be wrong, *viz.* that Examination in all Caſes neceſſarily ſuppoſes a previous Diſbelief. But if we ſhould grant it to be ſo, it does

* P. 13.

does not follow, that if a Man be allowed to doubt or diſbelieve for a while, therefore he may be allowed to doubt or diſbelieve for ever; and that if Doubting in ſome Caſes may be innocent, *i. e.* before the Evidence is laid before him, therefore it may be alſo innocent after the Evidence is fully propoſed to him. I think it cannot reaſonably be denied, that Doubting in many Caſes may be a Diſtemper of Mind, owing to very faulty Cauſes; and when once a Man's Doubting is become criminal, he is under a real Obligation to lay it aſide, and to rectify it, and may be required to do ſo, at leaſt by a divine Authority. When Evidences have been propoſed ſufficient to remove his Doubts, and his being ſtill in doubt is owing to a bad Temper of Mind, to a faulty Affectation, to an Unwillingneſs to be convinced, and to ſubmit to Evidence, which may often happen with regard to religious Truth; in that caſe, his perſiſting in his Doubt is really vicious and unreaſonable; and all the time he perſiſts in it, he is chargeable with a Crime, and accountable for his Conduct to the Supreme Judge, who knows the ſecret Diſpoſition of his Mind, and may juſtly condemn him for it.

In *Pag.* 16, 17. our Author, by a high-flown Encomium on Faith, its great Neceſſity and Importance, endeavours to deſtroy its Reaſonableneſs. He had repreſented, in ſtrong Colours, the early Influence of Prejudices and Paſſions, to ſhew that Reaſon *comes too late* to our aſſiſtance, and is too ſlow in her Advances; whereas Faith is neceſſary to guide us from the beginning of our Lives. And then he goes on to obſerve, that Faith is *neceſſary to*

ſtamp a Value on Morality, which, without it, is of no eſteem or acceptance with God: That it is the neceſſary *Paſſport*, without which we cannot die ſafely. But what his Deſign is, in all this fine Harangue on the Neceſſity of Faith, he lets us know, when he aſks, "Is it now any unwarrantable Concluſion from all theſe Conſiderations, to infer, that Religion therefore *can never be a thing to be taught*, that it muſt needs be ſomething that *doth not require* Time to attain, like other common Leſſons and Sciences, which are indifferent in their Conſequences? Since the very ſame Reaſons that make it neceſſary at all, make it equally ſo every moment of our Lives."

The Maxim here advanced by this Gentleman, that Religion or Faith *can never be a thing to be taught*, and that it is ſomething which doth *not require Time to attain*, is a very convenient one for him, and would no doubt anſwer his Intention very well. For if Religion cannot be taught, it is certain the Intellectual Faculty is not deſigned to lead Men into it. And it would follow, that neither Parents ſhould inſtruct their Children in the Principles of Religion, nor ſhould any Perſons be employed as publick Teachers; nor is there any need of the Scriptures, or of any Books at all for our Inſtruction; nor ſhould any Man uſe means to underſtand Religion himſelf, or teach it to others.

The Method he takes to prove, that Faith or Religion can never be taught, and that it requires no time to attain, is pretty extraordinary. It is what he infers from the Account he had given of the Neceſſity of Faith. And he obſerves, that *the very ſame*

ſame Reaſons that make it neceſſary at all, make it equally ſo every Moment of our Lives; that is, from the time of our Birth to our Death, and conſequently equally neceſſary to Infants as to adult Perſons, neceſſary before we have any uſe of our Reaſon, or are capable of being taught at all.

But this is a ſtrange way of repreſenting things. Let us grant all he can deſire about the Neceſſity of Faith to our Acceptance with God, and to our Salvation, yet ſtill it is neceſſary only in thoſe that are the capable Subjects of it. The neceſſity of holy Obedience, and of good Works, or keeping the Commandments of God, is as ſtrongly inſiſted upon in the ſacred Writings, as that of Faith. But Common Senſe teaches every Man to limit this, and the Nature of the thing limits it, that it muſt relate only to Perſons that are capable of moral Agency; and therefore not to Ideots, nor Infants before they come to the Uſe of their Reaſon. And the ſame thing may be ſaid with regard to the Declarations made concerning the Neceſſity of Faith. They are to be underſtood as relating only to thoſe that are naturally capable of it. Allowing Faith to be never ſo neceſſary, the Meaning is not, either that an equal Degree of Faith is neceſſary to all the Adult, how different ſoever their Advantages or Opportunities may be; or that it is at all neceſſary, in any degree, to be actually in Infants, before they have any uſe of Reaſon, or are capable of *knowing good and evil.*

One thing he urgeth, to ſhew the abſolute Neceſſity of Faith at all times, is, that it is neceſſary *to ſtamp a Value on Morality.* This is not true in the

the Extent in which he repreſents it, that without it the *beſt of Lives*, and *the moſt virtuous Actions*, are *highly criminal and diſpleaſing to God*; tho' he endeavours to prove this, according to his manner, by ſome miſapplied Texts of Scripture, which I ſhall not now turn aſide to examine. But allowing it to be ſo, it will not follow, that Faith is neceſſary before we are capable of moral Agency. It is ſome time before Children are capable of Actions properly moral, and for which they are accountable as moral Agents, becauſe it is ſome time before they are properly capable of exerciſing their Reaſon; in like manner, it is ſome time before they are in any degree capable of Faith. And by the time they are capable of Actions properly moral or religious, they are capable of believing too, as far as it is neceſſary for them to believe. So that Faith, and a good moral or religious Practice, may go together, from the time of their beginning to think and act rationally. And this, inſtead of proving that Faith or Religion cannot be taught, only ſhews the great neceſſity of teaching it betimes. And as their Reaſon or intellectual Faculty is for ſome time very imperfect, ſo their Faith is very imperfect too, and is capable of continual Increaſe and Improvement, as their Reaſon and Underſtanding improves. As Children begin very early to uſe their Reaſon, tho' in a very imperfect manner, ſo it is highly fit to begin to inſtruct them early in the Principles of Religion; and this may be fairly concluded from what our Author repreſents in ſo lively a manner, concerning the danger we are in betimes from the Snares of the World,

and

and from irregular Appetites and Paſſions, which ſoon begin to operate and exert a great influence upon us *. It is therefore a great advantage to any Perſon, to be *from a Child acquainted with the Holy Scriptures*, as *Timothy* was. And it is a great Inſtance of the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs, that God hath provided a Revelation for us, by inſtructing us in which, we may have our Minds early ſeaſoned with the moſt excellent Principles, and the moſt powerful Motives to engage us to a good and virtuous Practice. And Children may be gradually let into the Excellency of thoſe Doctrines and Laws, and the Evidences whereby they are confirmed, in a way accommodated to their Capacities. They may be taught what they are to believe, together with the Reaſons why they are to believe, as far as they are capable of receiving them, which undoubtedly will at firſt be in a very imperfect way. But yet it is ſuch a degree of Faith as is ſuited to their Age; a Faith ſufficient to influence their Practice, as far as Practice morally good and religious is required of them.

I had almoſt forgot an extraordinary Argument produced by this Writer, to ſhew that the Faith required of us, is not a rational Faith; and that is, that we are required to *pray for the Increaſe of our Faith*. From whence he thinks it follows, that it is *not expected that we ſhould contribute to its Eſtabliſhment by any Pains or Endeavours of our own* †. His Argument here proceeds upon the Suppoſition, that Prayer to God ſuperſedes the Uſe of all Means or Endeavours on our parts, and that we

* P. 14. † P. 10, 11.

we are never to pray to God for any thing, in which we are to contribute our own Endeavours; which is to ſay, that we are never to pray to God, either for a Bleſſing on our worldly Affairs, or to aſſiſt us in the Practice of Piety and Virtue: for it is evident, that in both theſe caſes we are obliged to uſe our own Endeavours. But it appears to me, to be the moſt conſiſtent thing in the world, ſuppoſing a God and a Providence, to uſe our own beſt Endeavours, and to apply to God for his Aſſiſtance and Bleſſing upon our Endeavours. And particularly, as it is our duty to make the beſt uſe we can of the Underſtanding and Faculties God hath given us, in enquiring after Truth; ſo Reaſon directs us, and it is what the beſt and wiſeſt of Men in all Ages have been ſenſible of, to apply to the Supreme Being, *the Father of Lights*, and the *God of Truth*, to aſſiſt us in our Enquiries, to open and enlighten our Minds to a clearer Diſcernment of the Truth, and to diſpoſe our Hearts for receiving it in the Love of it.

But he thinks it impoſſible, that *Grace can ever ſecond or add to the Faith that is founded in Reaſon.* The Reaſon he gives, is, becauſe *Increaſe of Evidence is the only Acceſſion to be made to rational Perſuaſion.* Allow this, then whatever increaſes the Evidence, or ſets it in a ſtronger light, or enables the Mind better to diſcern it, may make an Acceſſion to a rational Perſuaſion. Now I think it cannot be denied, that the Father of our Spirits can, by his gracious Influence upon the Mind, enable it more clearly to diſcern the Evidence, can ſet it in a ſtronger light, and help to diſpel vicious Prejudices;

Prejudices; and on ſuch a Suppoſition his Grace would increaſe our Faith in a way agreeable to Reaſon. And if ſo, there is no Inconſiſtency in humbly applying to God for that purpoſe, at the ſame time that we uſe our own diligent Endeavours. And it may well be thought that a wiſe and good God, the Lover of Truth and Virtue, will be ready to aſſiſt good and well-diſpoſed Minds, that are willing to embrace Truth and ſubmit to Evidence; and who, at the ſame time that they uſe their own Endeavours in the beſt manner they are able, are ſenſible of their Dependence upon him, and humbly apply to him for Light and Aſſiſtance in a Matter of ſuch Importance. And on the other hand, God may juſtly withhold his Aſſiſtance from thoſe who from a vain and arrogant Conceit of themſelves, one of the worſt Diſpoſitions for finding out Truth, do not apply to God for Light and Aſſiſtance, and perhaps ridicule his interpoſing in ſuch matters.

This may help us to judge of what the Author further offers *, where he repreſents the applying to God by Prayer for the *confirming and continuing us ſtedfaſt in the Faith*, to be a *diſavowing in the Fulneſs of our Conviction all future Uſe of Reaſon for our Security*. And he talks to the ſame purpoſe again †. But the reſolving to make a future Uſe of our Reaſon is very conſiſtent with our praying to God to confirm and continue us ſtedfaſt in the Faith. For here, as in the former Caſe, our Prayer ſtill ſuppoſes the Uſe of Means on our parts. We muſt take all proper Methods to know more

* P. 11. † P. 27.

and more of Religion, and to get a clearer view of the Evidence whereby it is confirmed, and to act under the governing Influence of it in the Practice of Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs; at the ſame time earneſtly begging of God that he would continue his divine Aſſiſtances, and enlighten our Minds more and more in the Knowledge of ſacred Truth; that he would cauſe us to ſee more of its Reaſonableneſs and Excellency, and feel more of its happy Influence on our Temper and Conduct. In which caſe our Stedfaſtneſs in the Faith would not be, what this Gentleman is here pleaſed to repreſent the Chriſtian *Perſeverance* to be, *a blind and fooliſh Obſtinacy to a preſent Notion*; but a ſteady Adherence to what we are perſuaded of upon good and ſolid grounds, ſo as not to be drawn aſide by any wrong Motives or artful Repreſentations, or thro' a Levity and Inſtability of Mind, from important Truth and Duty. And there is nothing in ſuch an Application to the Deity, but what would become any good and thinking Man, ſuppoſing Religion to be founded in Reaſon.

From *p.* 17. to *p.* 21. the Strain of his arguing ſeems to be this:——That if Faith were a rational Thing, the Generality of Mankind could not be juſtly required to believe, becauſe this would be a thing abſolutely above their Capacity. He ſets himſelf to ſhew, that there are few that are *capable of reaſoning at all.* And he particularly obſerves, that *the Nature and Evidence of Religion in the rational way is founded entirely on the Credit and Authentickneſs of Hiſtory, in which it is impoſſible to give any rational Deciſion without a good*

good natural Turn for Reaſoning, and even ſome very conſiderable Acquiſitions in Learning. And then he inſiſts upon a *Diſtinction*, which he thinks *is not ſufficiently attended to on this Subject*, viz. That *it is one thing whether a Propoſition be true in itſelf, and another whether a Man be bound to apprehend or believe it.* That therefore let Chriſtianity and the Evidence for the *Hiſtorical Facts of the Goſpel* be ſuppoſed to be never *ſo true in itſelf, and convincing to thoſe that have capacity to look into it*; yet the Generality of Mankind cannot *be bound* to believe it, becauſe they have not *Capacity* to diſcern the Force of the Proofs brought for it. It is a thing of which they can *have no perception*, nor can they frame any reaſonable Notion about it; any more than a Man that has no *Ear* can perceive or judge of Muſick, tho' *never ſo fine or juſt.*

It will eaſily be allowed, that a thing may be true, and yet all Men may not be bound to believe it; and that no Man can be obliged to believe a thing on rational grounds, when he is naturally incapable of perceiving or underſtanding the Evidence brought for it. But I differ very widely from this Gentleman in the Suppoſition he makes, that the Evidence for Chriſtianity is abſolutely above the natural Capacity of the Generality of Mankind.

Indeed, according to his Repreſentation, it is above their Capacity to know or believe any Religion at all. Man, according to his Account of him, inſtead of being formed a religious Creature, is naturally incapable of Religion, and therefore

ſhould not give himſelf any concern about it. He here repreſents it, as if it would be the moſt unjuſt and tyrannical thing in God to require Men to believe any thing that *is not ſelf-evident*, and in which there is the *leaſt of Induction or Inference*; and conſequently to require them to believe even the fundamental Principles of natural Religion, the Being of a God and a Providence: for it cannot be ſaid, that theſe are properly *ſelf-evident*; they are capable of being proved by *Induction* and *Inference*. Thus, in order to ſhew that Men are not capable of a rational Faith, he degrades the Generality of Mankind almoſt to a level with the Brutes in point of Underſtanding. He repreſents them as not *qualified for reaſoning at all*; as incapable of any thing that has *the leaſt of Induction or Inference* in it; that *their Souls are lodged in their hands*, as he politely expreſſeth it, *and their Apprehenſions extend not beyond a ſimple Propoſition, and they are thrown out at once at the very firſt mention of introducing a Medium*. But common Obſervation and Experience may convince any Man, that this is a very falſe and injurious Repreſentation of human Nature. We plainly ſee, that the Generality of Men in their common Affairs and Converſation daily uſe Mediums, and make Inductions and Inferences. And there are few, that when they are tried, and apply themſelves to it, are not capable of learning Things that depend upon Mediums, and which require an Exerciſe of the reaſoning Faculty. And I doubt not, God, who deſigned Men for Religion, has formed them ſo, that the Generality of Mankind

are

are capable of underſtanding the main Principles of it, as far as is ſufficient for them, if they will really take that pains and care which becomes them in Matters of ſuch Importance, and will uſe their Reaſon and the Faculties God has given them, as much as it is really in their power to do, and as they actually do in Things of far leſs conſequence.

I acknowledge indeed, that it would not be very conſiſtent with the State and Circumſtances of the Generality of Mankind, to enter into a minute Diſcuſſion in a way of Reaſoning into the ſeveral Doctrines and Principles of Religion, and regularly trace them by the force of their own Reflections thro' their genuine Connexions and Conſequences. And this ſhews the great Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in the Method he has taken for the Inſtruction of Mankind, by comprizing all that is neceſſary and proper for us to believe and know, relating to Religion, in a written ſtanding Revelation, which ſets before us the main Articles of Truth and Duty in plain Propoſitions, which they may without much difficulty underſtand. And the Evidence that is brought to prove that this is a Revelation from God, and that the Perſons who publiſhed it to the World in his Name were extraordinarily ſent and commiſſion'd by him, is ſuch as is reaſonably ſufficient to convince any Man of common Underſtanding, that will apply himſelf cloſely to conſider it. Nor is it neceſſary to a rational Belief, to enter into a particular Examination of every Difficulty and every Objection. A Man may firmly and upon good and ſolid grounds

believe

believe a God and a Providence, without knowing the ſeveral atheiſtical Schemes that have been advanced, or ſo much as any one of them; yea, and tho' he may meet with ſome Difficulties, that he is not well able to ſolve. So in revealed Religion, a Man may ſee ſo much reaſon to be perſuaded of the Truth of the extraordinary Facts by which it was atteſted, and he may have ſuch a ſtrong Senſe and Diſcernment of its excellent Nature and beneficial Tendency, and the divine Characters of Wiſdom, Goodneſs and Purity, that are diſcernible in it, as may render his Belief rational, and lay a Foundation for a holy Practice, tho' he does not know, or is not well able to ſolve all the Difficulties and Objections that a ſubtil Wit may raiſe againſt it.

And if there be any particular Perſons of ſuch weak Intellects or ſmall Opportunities, that they are incapable of forming a juſt Notion of the main Principles of that Revelation, and the Proofs and Evidences on which it is founded, in which caſe we may be ſure a merciful God will make all proper Allowances for their Weakneſs; this does not prove that Revelation to be uſeleſs, or not to be founded on good and rational Evidence. For, ſuppoſing God gives a Revelation at all, it is ſufficient to juſtify its Reaſonableneſs and Uſefulneſs, if it be ſuch that the Generality of Mankind of common Senſe and ordinary Underſtanding or Capacity, by applying to it with the Care and Attention that becomes them in ſuch a caſe, may ſufficiently underſtand it and comprehend the Force of its Proofs, ſo far as to make it reaſonable for them

to

to receive it with a Faith that may influence their Practice, and have a happy Tendency to purify their Hearts and reform their Lives. And if ſome of its Proofs be ſuch, that they could not have found them out of themſelves, it is ſufficient that they can comprehend them when laid before them by others. It is plain to any one that conſiders the State of Mankind, that we ſtand in need of mutual Aſſiſtance and Information in many Caſes of great conſequence. And it is every Man's Duty in ſuch a caſe, to uſe Means to get the beſt Aſſiſtance and Information he can, and then to judge upon the whole by the Reaſon and Underſtanding which God hath given him. And I am perſuaded, that a moderate Share of that Care and Pains that is taken in other Things, would ordinarily ſerve to give Men ſuch a Notion of Religion and its Proofs, as may make it reaſonable for them to yield an Aſſent to it, and to govern their Practice by it. And this has actually been the caſe of many that have not had more Capacity or Leiſure than others, that thro' a faulty Negligence of Mind, or the Influence of corrupt Luſts and evil Habits, have lived in an ignorance of it.

As to what this Gentleman alledges, concerning the Incapacity of the Vulgar to judge of the hiſtorical Evidence of Religion, I think it may be juſtly affirmed, that hiſtorical Evidence is a kind of Proof as obvious to common Underſtandings as any that can be offered; far more eaſily comprehended, and which they can more eaſily judge of than they could underſtand or judge of metaphyſical abſtracted Reaſonings; and which may be ſo circumſtanced, that

that a Man of an ordinary Capacity may perceive the Force of it, and may ſee it reaſonable for him to receive Things upon that Evidence. It cannot be denied, that with regard to many Events that happened many Ages ago, tho' the original Hiſtories that give an account of thoſe things are in the learned Languages; yet one that has not Learning himſelf may have ſuch a moral Certainty concerning them from the Conſent of thoſe that do underſtand thoſe original Hiſtories, or from the Hiſtories themſelves tranſlated into his own Tongue, that he may ſee plainly, that it would be perfectly unreaſonable to doubt of the Truth of thoſe Facts. Any Man of common Underſtanding may obſerve, that by the Acknowledgment of all Mankind, it is very reaſonable to believe Facts that were done in paſt Ages, when the Accounts of them are tranſmitted to us in credible authentick Records. And thoſe Records are juſtly accounted authentick, that were written by Perſons who were well acquainted with the Facts they relate, and who at the ſame time appear to have been Perſons of great Probity and Sincerity. And it gives great force to this, if the Facts themſelves were of a publick nature, and eſpecially if thoſe Facts produced great and ſurprizing Changes in the World; but above all, if the Effects of them have continued even to the preſent Age. And it is no ſmall Confirmation of all this, if it appears that thoſe Records can be traced from this preſent Age, up to the very Age in which they were firſt written; *i. e.* the Age in which the Facts were ſaid to be done, and ſtill found to have been in being, and referred to in many Writings ſtill extant. There

There is nothing in all this, but what may appear to carry great Reaſon and Evidence in it, to any Man of common ſound Underſtanding. And it is eaſy to apply this to the Facts upon which the Chriſtian Religion is founded.

The Accounts of theſe Facts are tranſmitted to us in the beſt and propereſt way, in which paſt Facts could be tranſmitted; that is, in Records written by Perſons who profeſs to have been Witneſſes to them, and who appear to have been perfectly well-acquainted with the Facts they relate. And an honeſt, tho' unlearned Man, may, by conſulting thoſe Records, without entering into any nice hiſtorical Diſquiſitions, find great reaſon to believe, that the Accounts there given of thoſe extraordinary Facts are true, and to be depended on. Upon an attentive conſidering them, he finds all the Characters of Sincerity, and an impartial Regard to Truth, that can be deſired in ſuch Writings: He finds enough to convince him, that the Writers of them were excellent Perſons, of great Probity and Simplicity, and who appear to have had no worldly Intereſts in view, nothing but the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind, and whoſe whole Character and Conduct ſeems to have been the moſt remote from that of Impoſtors, that can be imagined. And this furniſhes a good Argument, to convince his Reaſon, that ſuch excellent Perſons could never be guilty of ſuch a ſolemn Impoſture, ſuch deliberate Villainy, as to have contrived ſuch a Series of extraordinary Facts and miraculous Atteſtations, and to have endeavoured to impoſe them upon the World in the Name of God,

even if it had been in their power to have done ſo. And there is no reaſon to think they could have done it, if they had been ever ſo willing, conſidering the Circumſtances they were in, the Power and Malice of their Enemies, and the Nature of the Facts themſelves; many of which were ſuch, that it would have been the eaſieſt thing in the world to have detected and expoſed them, if they had not been true.

It greatly ſtrengthens this, when he conſiders the Nature of the Religion that is taught in thoſe Writings, and which is cloſely connected with the Facts there related. He plainly finds, that in that Religion, as laid down in thoſe Writings, there are not the leaſt Marks of worldly Ambition, Avarice, or Senſuality, nor any thing to flatter the corrupt Appetites and Inclinations of Men; that there is an uniform Spirit of Piety, Zeal, and Charity, running through the whole; that its Doctrines and Precepts are unqueſtionably pure and holy, and of the moſt excellent Tendency; that the Practice of Righteouſneſs and Virtue is there carried to the nobleſt height, and inforced by the moſt important Motives; that it ſtrongly condemns all Falſhood and Impurity, and denounces the Wrath of God againſt all Ungodlineſs and Unrighteouſneſs of Men. In a word, that the governing End of all ſeems to be the Glory of God, the Good of Mankind, and the promoting the Cauſe of Truth and Holineſs in the World. This furniſhes an obvious Argument, of great force and ſtrength to convince him, that ſuch a Religion, with the Facts on which it is founded, and which it neceſſarily ſuppoſes, and

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every where refers to, was not the Contrivance of Impoſtors and Seducers. Men of ſuch a Character would never have taken ſuch pains to eſtabliſh ſuch a Religion as this, and that in oppoſition to all their worldly Intereſts, and when they thereby expoſed themſelves to the greateſt Sufferings, under which they had nothing to ſupport them, but the Hopes of a Reward in another World, which, according to that Religion, if guilty of ſuch deliberate Falſhood and Impoſture, they could not expect.

Theſe are very natural and obvious Reflections, the Force of which may be made to appear to any Man of common Underſtanding, and which without entering into any great Refinements, or tedious Diſquiſitions, may be of great weight to convince him, that the Writings which contain the original Records of Chriſtianity, and the Facts by which it was atteſted, are to be depended upon.

But beſides this, if he purſues his Enquiries, he may eaſily find, that there are ſome general Facts relating to thoſe Matters, which are univerſally acknowledged, and which no Man was ever ſo abſurd as to deny. That there were ſuch Perſons as Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles, can no more reaſonably be doubted than that there are Chriſtians now in the World. And that Chriſt declared himſelf to be an extraordinary Perſon ſent of God, that he profeſſed to do many wonderful Works, and to inſtruct Mankind in Religion, and that he was crucified, is what the Heathens and Jews, the moſt virulent Enemies of Chriſtianity, never pretended to deny.

And that his Apoſtles went abroad through the Nations after his Death, and publiſhed to the World that he was riſen from the dead, and aſcended up into Heaven, of which they declared themſelves to have been Eye-witneſſes; and that they profeſſed to deliver the Religion they received from him, and pretended to work Miracles in his Name, is capable of as good Proof as that there were ſuch Perſons as the Apoſtles: Nor do the greateſt Enemies of Chriſtianity attempt to conteſt this. And it is alſo a Fact that cannot, with any ſhadow of Reaſon, be conteſted; and which is capable of the cleareſt Proof even from the Teſtimony of Heathen Writers now extant, and ſome of which are tranſlated into our own Tongue *, that great Numbers of Perſons in that very Age became Chriſtians, *i. e.* received that Jeſus who had been ignominiouſly crucified by the *Romans* and *Jews*, as their Saviour and their Lord: And that the Religion founded by him and his Apoſtles, though contrary to the moſt favourite Prejudices and Paſſions both of Jews and Gentiles, prevailed and ſpread in a ſhort time to a wonderful degree, though it had the greateſt Oppoſition made to it, and no worldly Advantages to recommend it. Theſe are Facts which are ſo clear and certain, that a Man may as reaſonably doubt of all paſt Facts whatſoever as doubt of them. And upon conſidering theſe things, it is natural to reflect, that there muſt have been ſomething very extraordinary in the Evidence, that could induce ſuch Numbers of Perſons,

* Particularly *Suetonius*, in the Life of *Nero*; *Tacitus*, in the Fifteenth Book of his *Annals*; and *Pliny*, in the Tenth Book of his *Epiſtles*, Epiſt. 97.

ſons, at a time when they had the beſt Opportunities of knowing the Truth of thoſe things, to embrace the Faith of a crucified Jeſus, in oppoſition to their darling Prejudices and worldly Intereſts. And this again makes the Account credible, that is given in thoſe original Records, of the Evidence whereby Perſons were brought to believe in Jeſus, and to embrace his Religion; an Evidence ariſing from a Series of ſuch extraordinary and illuſtrious Atteſtations, as demonſtrated Jeſus, who was crucified, to be ſent of God, and the Religion publiſhed by him and his Apoſtles, to be divine. On ſuch a View of things, the wonderful Progreſs of that Religion in ſuch Circumſtances, and the Zeal and Conſtancy of its firſt Profeſſors and Adherents, may be well accounted for, which otherwiſe could hardly be done. And this, added to the Reflections juſt mentioned, ariſing from the Character of the Writings themſelves, and the Nature of the Religion there contained, helps to ſet the Truth of the main Facts, on which that Religion was founded, in a yet ſtronger light.

It is no ſmall Confirmation of all this, that it can be proved with great Evidence, enough to ſatisfy any reaſonable Mind, that theſe Writings that contain the original Records of Chriſtianity, have been and are ſtill extant, and their Authority has been acknowledged from the Time in which Chriſtianity was firſt founded, to the preſent Age. Never were there Writings that were diſperſed into ſo many hands, or that were ſo frequently appealed to by Men of different Sects and Parties, on ſo many different Occaſions. Not one Age hath paſſed

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from the time in which they were written to the preſent, in which thoſe Writings have not been referred to, and many Paſſages, and often large Portions, cited out of them. This is a matter, of which an unlearned Man may have ſuch an Aſſurance, by the concurring Teſtimony of thoſe that have Opportunities of examining thoſe things, however widely differing in their Sentiments in other matters, as well as by large Portions of original Writings tranſlated into his own Tongue, that he cannot reaſonably doubt of it. Eſpecially when he finds, that thoſe who ſeem willing to lay hold of all Advantages againſt Chriſtianity, are not able to invalidate this Evidence; but inſtead of anſwering the diſtinct Proofs that have been brought, have recourſe to general Clamours and Invectives againſt hiſtorical Evidence and moral Certainty, which they themſelves freely admit in other Caſes. And whereas they make a mighty Noiſe about Corruptions and Alterations in thoſe Writings, by the Fraud of thoſe through whoſe Hands they have been tranſmitted; a Man of a common Underſtanding, and an honeſt Mind, may be ſatisfied that theſe Clamours are groundleſs; becauſe upon impartially examining thoſe Writings, he finds no Marks of thoſe Corruptions or Innovations there, that he is told have been introduced into the Chriſtian Church in theſe latter Ages, no worldly Schemes of Ambition or Power. And tho' Chriſtians are, and have been for many Ages, divided into many Sects and Parties, very different in many things from one another, yet he finds it generally agreed, that thoſe Writings are preſerved the ſame among them

them all, without any greater Differences than what muſt be expected to ariſe from a great Number of Copies diſperſed in ſeveral Countries, and which do not affect any of the main Facts or Doctrines contained there. Nor have any of the different Parties been able, if they had attempted it, to alter thoſe ſacred Writings in favour of their peculiar Corruptions. Thoſe Writings ſtill exhibit an Idea of Chriſtianity, as it was in its primitive Simplicity. And it is manifeſt, that if they had been deſignedly corrupted and interpolated in ſucceeding Ages after they were firſt publiſhed, they would have been in many things very different from what they now appear. And it is very remarkable, that thoſe very Corruptions among Chriſtians are plainly foretold there, and a great Apoſtacy pointed out by very remarkable Characters.

Thus a good Acquaintance with the ſacred Writings may, in a great meaſure, furniſh a Man of common ſound Underſtanding, that knows no more than his Mother-Tongue, with an Anſwer to the moſt conſiderable Objections brought againſt Chriſtianity. And if, beſides all this, he finds in his own Senſe and Experience, the happy Influence of thoſe ſacred Writings, and of the Doctrines and Motives there contained, upon his own Temper and Conduct, for forming his Soul to the moſt excellent Diſpoſitions towards God and Man, for comforting him in his Afflictions, for engaging him to ſubdue and mortify his corrupt Appetites and Paſſions, for raiſing his Views to the Things which are above, and powerfully drawing him to the Practice of univerſal Holineſs and Virtue: Taking all this together,

ther, his own Senſation, Reaſon, and Experience concur to furniſh the moſt perſuaſive Evidence to convince him that it is divine. To all which it may be added, that a good and upright Man, who is willing to know and do the Will of God and earneſtly applies to him for his divine Assistances, may alſo expect the gracious Aids of his Spirit, for farther diſpoſing his Mind more clearly and fully to diſcern and feel the Light and Force of the Goſpel-Evidence. And that there is nothing in ſuch a Suppoſition contrary to Reaſon, I may afterwards ſhew.

As to the Flirts this Gentleman gives at ſome of the Arguments that have been brought for Chriſtianity, ſuch as what he calls *ingenious Applications of myſterious Prophecies, and their References*; *the profound Calculation of* Daniel's *Weeks, the Analogy of Reaſon and Revelation*; let us ſuppoſe that there are Numbers of thoſe to whom *the Precept of Believing is addreſs'd*, who are not well able to trace theſe, and ſome other Arguments for Chriſtianity, through *all their Connexions and Inferences*; this does by no means prove, either that theſe Arguments are of no uſe at all, or that the Generality of Mankind, though they do not concern themſelves much about them, have not Evidence ſufficient to lay a juſt and reaſonable Foundation for believing. For the Wiſdom of God has ſo ordered it, that the Proofs of Chriſtianity, as well as of Natural Religion, even in its moſt important Principles, admit of great Variety of Illuſtrations and Arguments; ſome of general uſe, and fit to take hold of common Capacities, that will apply themſelves

ſelves to conſider them, and others that are fitted to give farther Light and Conviction even to Perſons of greater Learning and ſuperior Underſtanding; and who often are more liable to be aſſaulted with Doubts and ſubtil Objections than the Vulgar. And if theſe laſt are not capable of all the Proofs, the Force of which appears to the Learned, ſo neither are they liable to all the Difficulties and Objections that lie in the way of the other. And whereas this Author ſeems to think, that Religion, conſidering its Importance, ought to be ſelf-evident, and that it cannot ſtand in need of *far-fetch'd Apologies, and labour'd Arts to reconcile and explain it*, nor can any Part of its *Evidence* be *founded on any Complication of Circumſtances to be traced out with Induſtry and Addreſs* *; for my part, I cannot ſee, why, when no other Knowledge or valuable Attainment can be obtain'd without Care and Induſtry, Religion alone ſhould be inconſiſtent with it, and require no Pains or Care at all. If Religion be of ſuch neceſſity and importance, it certainly deſerves our Care and Diligence. And I cannot think it unbecoming the Wiſdom and Equity of God ſo to order it, that Men cannot be truly religious, or attain either to the Knowledge or Practice of it without Care and Application. Many Arguments in behalf of Truths of the higheſt Importance may be laboured, and yet very uſeful: And there are many that both have leiſure and capacity to conſider and diſcern the Force of them. For tho', as this Gentleman expreſſes it, all *the Candidates of Heaven* be not *Scholars or Philoſophers*,

* P. 21.

yet ſome are; and if thoſe Arguments be inſtrumental to the ſtrengthening the Faith of ſuch Perſons, they anſwer a valuable End: And ſuch Perſons may be of uſe to aſſiſt the Faith of others. And I doubt not, many of thoſe that are uſually called Unlearned, tho' they could not of themſelves without Aſſiſtance trace out the Applications of ſome Prophecies, or calculate *Daniel*'s Weeks, yet may diſcern the Force of the Proofs, and reap the Advantage of them, when ſet in a proper light by others. But I find this Gentleman here, as in ſeveral other Paſſages of his Book, ſeems uneaſy at all Attempts in defence of Chriſtianity. He would fain perſuade Chriſtians never to meddle with Argument at all, or concern themſelves about any of the Evidences or Reaſons produced for it; and, if they will believe him, all Attempts of this kind are uſeleſs, and even pernicious. And this, no doubt, proceeds from his great Friendſhip for Chriſtianity, of which he has given ſo many convincing Proofs in this Performance. It is from the ſame Principle that he repreſents thoſe as the beſt Chriſtians, that *never concern themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative Taſks*, &c *. I allow indeed, that there are good People that perhaps do not much trouble themſelves about the Proofs of Religion in an argumentative way; and where their Faith has a purifying Influence on their Hearts and Lives, it is graciouſly accepted of God. And even in this caſe the Senſe and Diſcernment they have of the internal Characters of Goodneſs and Purity in the Chriſtian Religion, and the happy Influence they feel its Doctrines and

* P. 22.

and Motives have upon them, to engage them to the Practice of Piety and Virtue, is to them a perſuaſive Argument to convince them of its divine Original. But yet I think it can ſcarce be denied, that a Man that takes pains to conſider the Evidences for Chriſtianity, and in conſequence of this firmly believes it, and governs himſelf by its excellent Rules, acts a better Part, and approves himſelf a better Chriſtian, than he that is not ſo diligent to inform himſelf concerning it. But I ſuppoſe our Author would count thoſe the beſt Part of Mankind, that never concern themſelves about any Religion at all; which ſeems to be the Deſign, or at leaſt the Tendency of ſeveral of his Arguments.

This Writer having done all in his power to prove that the Generality of Mankind are incapable of Faith or Religion if it be rational, ſets himſelf next to ſhew, that even Men of Learning, yea, *the ableſt and beſt of Men*, are *diſqualified for fair reaſoning*, or judging impartially of the Evidence of Chriſtianity, by their *natural Prejudices*. That *Prejudice, ever earlier than the firſt Eſſays of Reaſon, is as abſolute a Diſqualification for ſuch a Taſk, as the greateſt natural Incapacity* *. What he farther offers there concerning the Power of Prejudice, appears to me to have no other tendency than to introduce univerſal Scepticiſm; as if no Man living was capable of reaſoning fairly, or judging truly. But it is not true, that the Prejudices to which all Men are in ſome degree ſubjected, do as abſolutely diſqualify a Man for forming a fair and equitable Judgment of Things, as *the greateſt*

* P. 22.

natural Incapacity. In the one caſe it is impoſſible, in the other it is far from being ſo. Where there is an honeſt and an upright Mind, open to Conviction, and ready to receive the Evidence that is offered, a Man may overcome his Prejudices and judge fairly and impartially, as appears from thouſands of Inſtances both in Religion and other Matters. And particularly there were at the firſt Promulgation of Chriſtianity numerous Inſtances of Perſons, that broke thro' the ſtrongeſt Prejudices, *natural Attachments to Cuſtoms, Perſons and Things*, to borrow this Gentleman's Expreſſions, overcome by the Evidence that attended it, and the Proofs of a divine Original. If we have not thoſe Prejudices now in our way, it is an advantage we ſhould be thankful for; and if by being educated in a regard to Chriſtianity we rather have Prejudices in its favour, a juſt and fair Examination and Enquiry may be carried on notwithſtanding this, as hath been already ſhewn.

Our Author concludes this Part of his Attempt with obſerving *, that "It is to be remembred all "along, and carried with us carefully thro' all "thoſe Conſiderations, that the great Command "to believe is peremptory and abſolute. No Con-"ditions in the caſe, that we ſhall believe if we "have *Time*, if we have *Abilities*, or if preceding "*Prejudices* have not firſt taken too faſt hold to "prevent us." It is true, there are no ſuch Conditions expreſſed, and it would be abſurd if there were ſo. Suppoſing that upon giving a Revelation of his Will to Mankind, attended with ſuch Evidence

* P. 23.

Evidence as he ſaw and knew to be ſufficient if it were not their own faults, God ſhould command them to believe and to receive it, which I have ſhewn in ſuch a caſe he might juſtly do; it would not be very wiſe to expreſs it thus, Believe, and receive it, if you have *Time*; Believe, if you have *Abilities*; Believe, if *Prejudices have not taken too faſt hold to prevent you*. This would have been regarded as giving an Allowance to Unbelief and Diſobedience in the Law itſelf. People would ſoon have taken advantage of it, and it would have been the ready way to render them careleſs and negligent about it. If ſuch a Command were deſigned to have any effect at all, it muſt be delivered in peremptory and abſolute Terms, the better to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and engage them to apply themſelves to conſider the Evidence without delay, and to take pains to diveſt themſelves of culpable Prejudices. If it appears, that they really had not natural Abilities, or were under an invincible Incapacity, which may be often pretended where it is far from being the caſe, the ſupreme Lawgiver will eaſily be able to make the proper Allowances, when he comes to judge them for their Conduct.

Nor does it follow from the Command's being expreſſed in general Terms, that an equal Degree of Faith is required of all Men in order to Salvation; or that all Men are *required at the Peril of their Souls to be in the right*; that is, to have a right Notion and Belief in all the Doctrines propoſed to us to be believed. Thus our Author thinks fit to repreſent it in his Pamphlet. But nothing is

more

more evident, than that in Scripture it is all along ſuppoſed, that there are different Degrees of Faith and Knowledge; and that Perſons may be *weak in Faith,* who yet are ſincere, and ſhall be accepted. Some are repreſented as *Babes in Chriſt,* ſome as *ſtrong Men:* Some as knowing only *the firſt Principles of the Oracles of God*; others, as arrived to a higher Degree of Knowledge, and *going on unto Perfection*; a Faith that is true and acceptable in its firſt Commencement, is yet repreſented as capable of *growing exceedingly,* and of receiving great Increaſe and continual Improvement. With regard to Truths of the higheſt Importance, even in natural Religion, ſuch as the Being of a God, and a Providence, tho' ſome Knowledge and Belief of this is neceſſary, and lies at the Foundation of all Religion, yet it is not abſolutely required, that all Men ſhould be equally right in their Notions concerning it, and in the Ideas they form of God and his Attributes. It is ſufficient if there be ſuch a Belief as engages them to love and reverence, to worſhip and obey him in Sincerity. The ſame may be ſaid with regard to Chriſtianity. It is not abſolutely required as neceſſary to Salvation, that Men ſhould believe and think rightly of all the Doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion, tho' in themſelves true and of great Importance; or that even in Points of the higheſt Conſequence they ſhould exactly have the ſame Ideas, and their Notions be alike clear and juſt. They may, with regard to ſome Things in thoſe Doctrines, have miſtaken Notions; but a merciful God will make Allowances for their Weakneſs, and graciouſly accept their

Faith

Faith as ſufficient, if they know and believe ſo much of theſe Things, as engages them to love *Jeſus Chriſt* in Sincerity, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World. Where this is the Caſe, Men ſhall be accepted according to the Goſpel-Covenant, tho' there be a great variety in their Attainments, and in the Degrees of their Faith and Knowledge.

Hitherto this Gentleman has labour'd hard to prove that a rational Faith is unattainable or impoſſible; but from *p.* 24. to *p.* 35. he bends himſelf to ſhew, that ſuppoſing a Man to have attained to the higheſt degree of a rational Faith, it would be no way ſufficient to anſwer the End, or to *furniſh out thoſe Effects which are deſcribed* in the Goſpel to *attend a juſt Belief*. It will never produce that *active Zeal* for Religion, or that Conſtancy and *Perſeverance* that is there required, or that *Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind, which is the bleſſed Effect of a true and genuine Faith*. It will not be ſufficient to engage a Man to mortify his *depraved Appetites* and *Paſſions*, much leſs to ſuffer *Martyrdom*, if called to it, for his Religion.

In what he offers to prove, that a rational Faith can never produce that Zeal which the Goſpel requires, the Force of his Argument depends partly upon the wrong Account he gives of the Nature of a true Chriſtian Zeal, as if it were a blind irrational Heat, a *Zeal not according to Knowledge*, and partly upon Sceptical Principles, as if no Man can ever in Reaſon be certain of any thing, becauſe it is poſſible he may be miſtaken. But if by Zeal be meant what the Goſpel intends by it, a hearty

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and ardent Concern for propagating important Truth and Duty, not by Methods of Perſecution and Violence, which the Goſpel never recommends, but by Perſuaſion and Argument, and all Methods conſiſtent with Juſtice and Charity; this is what Reaſon cannot but approve. And the bare Poſſibility of a Man's being miſtaken, will never be in reaſon ſufficient to render him indifferent about what he apprehends upon the moſt impartial Conſideration to be true, and of great conſequence to the Cauſe of Religion and Virtue. In ſuch a caſe, if he hath any love to Truth, or any concern for the Honour of the Deity, or for the Good of Mankind; that is, if he be a Man really of good Diſpoſitions, he cannot but be deſirous to ſpread the Knowledge of ſuch Truths by all fair and juſt Methods that are in his power.

As this Gentleman, the better to anſwer his End, has thought fit to repreſent the Zeal required in the Goſpel as a *Zeal without Knowledge*, an irrational Fervour, ſo to prove that a rational Faith cannot produce that Perſeverance which is the Duty of Chriſtians, he repreſents this Perſeverance to be an obſtinate Reſolution to diſclaim all farther Trial, and ſhut their Eyes againſt all Evidence that might be offered, tho' never ſo ſtrong; and in effect to be what he had before repreſented it, a *blind and fooliſh Obſtinacy to a preſent Notion.* But if by Perſeverance be underſtood a ſteady and conſtant Adherence to what a Man is upon good grounds perſuaded is Truth and Duty, ſo as not to ſuffer himſelf to be turned from it by worldly Bribes or Threatnings, or to be ſhaken by the Arts of ſubtil Seducers;

Seducers; this is a Temper of Mind becoming a wiſe and good Man, and is what right Reaſon approves. That a Man ought not for any worldly Conſiderations to renounce and deny what he is convinced in his own Conſcience is true and right, is a Duty that natural Religion preſcribes; and it is alſo highly reaſonable, that when a Man has once got his Mind well-eſtabliſhed in the main Principles of Religion upon good and ſolid grounds, he ſhould not ſuffer himſelf to be eaſily turned aſide by every Wind of Doctrine. It is thought very reaſonable in other caſes to proceed upon things well proved, to lay them down as Principles, and not to be for ever diſputing them over again. Where a Thing is once confirmed by Arguments ſufficient in their kind, the greateſt Maſters of Reaſon have acknowledged that we ought not to be ſhaken from it by Objections, tho' we may perhaps find it hard to anſwer them. And the contrary Conduct cannot properly be called an Openneſs to Conviction, but an Unſteadineſs and Volatility of Mind, which is not the Effect of Reaſon, but is really a Diſeaſe, and a very pernicious one; and which, where it prevails, hinders a Man from being ever ſettled in any Principles at all. This indeed ſeems to be what this Gentleman intends. The Strain of his arguing, *p.* 25, 26, 27. is to this purpoſe, that a Man can never come to a ſatisfying Certainty or *Aſſurance of Truth* in any point whatſoever, becauſe he is not *infallible*, and may *poſſibly be miſtaken*; and becauſe it *is not impoſſible but ſome new Evidence may ſucceed*, and he may hereafter ſee Things in a different light; and that there-

fore a rational Faith muſt always be *precarious, and ſubject to change.* But this way of reaſoning is very fallacious. A Man may be ſufficiently certain of a Truth, to lay a juſt Foundation for a Satisfaction of Mind, and for a ſuitable Courſe of Action, when upon the moſt impartial Conſideration it appears to him founded upon ſolid Arguments, tho' at the ſame time he knows he is not infallible. And it is very abſurd, to pretend that no Man can ever be ſure of what he is convinced by Reaſon and Argument is true, becauſe there is a bare remote Poſſibility that ſome time or other he may alter his Judgment concerning it. I ſee no other tendency in all this, but to unſettle Perſons from all Principles whatſoever, and to keep them in an eternal Fluctuation and Uncertainty; which is what neither Reaſon preſcribes, nor the Author of our Beings ever intended.

In matters of Practice relating to the Affairs of this Life, it would be abſurd to the laſt degree, to ſay that a Man muſt never act nor come to a determinate Reſolution, till he is abſolutely ſure it could not poſſibly be otherwiſe. And it would be equally abſurd, to advance this as a Principle in Matters of Faith and Religion, on which the Practice of Holineſs and Virtue and our Preparations for a future World ſo much depend; and the Conſequences of neglecting a proper preſent Practice upon bare remote Surmiſes and Poſſibilities, would be in this caſe infinitely more pernicious.

The laſt Part of his Argument, and what he moſt largely inſiſts upon, is, that a rational Faith, *i. e.* a Faith founded on rational Conviction and Evidence,

Evidence, can never have force enough to engage us to mortify our *moſt beloved Affections and Appetites*, much leſs to engage us to ſuffer Martyrdom for the Truth, if called to it. He declaims upon this Subject with a great deal of Rhetorick, from *p.* 30. to *p.* 35. He paints the Difficulty of ſubduing the Paſſions, and of a virtuous Life, in the ſtrongeſt Colours; and in ſuch a manner, that one would be apt to think he felt in himſelf what he deſcribed, and that his own Inclinations and Appetites were much too ſtrong for his Reaſon.

The Streſs of his Argument lies here, that the utmoſt Certainty and Evidence that Faith can attain to in a rational way, is a moral Certainty and Evidence, and that this can never be ſufficient to the Purpoſes of Religion. He is ready *to grant all the moral Certainty in the Proofs of Religion that you can reaſonably deſire; and farther, that this is indeed the higheſt degree of rational Evidence, that the Nature of the Subject can poſſibly admit of.* He ſuppoſes it to *have all the moſt favourable Circumſtances, that the ſevereſt Malice of an exceptious Critick can demand* *. One would think theſe were pretty large Conceſſions; but at the ſame time, and almoſt in the ſame breath, in which he ſeems to allow ſuch a degree of Certainty to that moral Evidence, he repreſents it as after all *an Uncertainty, a doubtful Account*; that it is *ſtill but human Teſtimony in its nature, ever liable to Error, as depending only on fallible Authors.* That it cannot produce a *thorough Conviction*; and *its true Amount in a time of Trial is, that it is nothing*

* P. 31, 32.

more than the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge, upon the traditional Teſtimony of a fallible Witneſs. He has more to the ſame purpoſe, *pag.* 52, 53. where he ſeems willing to carry it ſo far, as not to allow that any Man can be ſure of any thing, but what he himſelf ſees with his own Eyes.

It is very eaſy to declaim, in a plauſible manner, on the Weakneſs and Inſufficiency of moral Evidence, and the Fallibility of hiſtorical human Teſtimony; and this ſeems to be a darling Commonplace with theſe Gentlemen. But it is all mere Harangue, and only fit to impoſe upon thoſe that will ſuffer themſelves to be carried away with Sounds; ſince it cannot be denied, that this kind of Evidence may be, and often is ſo circumſtanced, that the Man would ſcarce be looked upon to be in his Senſes, that ſhould ſeriouſly deny or doubt of it. It is but by moral Evidence, and the Teſtimony of fallible Men, capable of deceiving and being deceived, that I know there is ſuch a Place as *Paris* or *Rome*; for I never ſaw either of thoſe Cities; and yet I can no more reaſonably doubt of it, than if I myſelf had been there. It is by moral Evidence that we have all our Laws, the Records of our own or any other Nation, and that we enjoy the Benefit of the Knowledge and Experience of former Ages, and have any Aſſurance of paſt Facts; and yet is there any Man of common Senſe, that does not as certainly believe many ſuch Facts that were done in former Ages, as he believes any Event that happened of late Years, and within his own Memory? It is manifeſt, that the Author of

our

our Beings, and the wiſe Governour of the World, deſigned that moſt part of our Knowledge ſhould come in this way, and that we ſhould be governed and determined by this kind of Evidence and Teſtimony, in many Caſes of great Importance. The Neceſſity we are under to do this, ariſeth from the very Frame of our Nature, and the Conſtitution of Things, and the Circumſtances in which we are placed in the World, and conſequently from the Will and Appointment of God himſelf. Why then ſhould it be thought abſurd to ſuppoſe that he ſhould order it ſo, that our Knowledge of ſome important Matters of Religion ſhould alſo come in this way? Can any Reaſon be aſſigned, why when this is allowed to be proper and ſufficient with regard to all other Facts, it ſhould not be admitted with regard to Facts in which Religion is nearly concerned? And yet our Author declaims pathetically upon it, *Pag.* 50, 51. and aſks, *Are we to imagine, that God would ever leave a Matter of ſuch Conſequence upon ſuch a Foundation?* If God has been ever pleaſed to give a Revelation to Mankind at all, all but the Perſons that lived in the very Age and Place in which that Revelation was firſt made, muſt receive the Doctrines and Laws of it, and the Knowledge of the Facts by which it was atteſted in that way; and if that Revelation be tranſmitted to us in a way, which we ourſelves ſhould count unqueſtionable in any other Caſe, and we have as much aſſurance of the Facts, as we could juſtly expect concerning any Facts done at that diſtance, he may reaſonably require our Aſſent; and our refuſing in ſuch a caſe to yield an Aſ-

ſent,

ſent, could not be properly ſaid to be owing to a Want of Evidence, becauſe we admit ſuch Evidence in other Caſes, but to ſome other Cauſes, and thoſe not very juſtifiable ones, and to an Averſion and Oppoſition of Mind to its Doctrines and Laws. And I am afraid, that in ſuch a caſe it would hardly be accepted as a ſufficient Excuſe for Perſons to plead, that they *laboured under the inſuperable Incapacity of a particular Infidel Make, and Anti-chriſtian Complexion*, as he expreſſes it *, which put it *entirely out of their power to join in giving an Aſſent*; ſince this Infidel Conſtitution would appear not to be of God's making, but of their own.

If the Laws and Doctrines of the Chriſtian Revelation are tranſmitted to us with as much Evidence as we could reaſonably expect, ſuppoſing a Revelation really to have been given ſome Ages ago; and if we have all that Evidence concerning the extraordinary Facts whereby it was originally atteſted, which could well be expected ſuppoſing thoſe Facts really to have been done; he that receives that Revelation, its Doctrines and Laws, and the Accounts of the Facts upon that Evidence, *i. e.* upon as high Evidence as the Nature of the thing will bear, may approve himſelf to God and his own Conſcience, as having acted a right part, and ſuch, as we may ſuppoſe, a wiſe and righteous God will graciouſly accept from reaſonable Beings. And on the other hand, it may be juſtly queſtioned, whether they that refuſe to accept a Revelation as coming from God, though attended with all the Evidence that any paſt Revelation could be juſtly expected

* P. 45.

expected to have, can approve themſelves to the great Governour of the World and Lord of Conſcience, as having acted an honeſt and reaſonable part. For it is in effect, as if a Man ſhould declare, let a Revelation have been given in former Ages never ſo well atteſted and confirmed, and tho' that Revelation is tranſmitted with all the Evidence, and in as ſure a way as a Revelation given in paſt Ages could be tranſmitted, yet I will not receive it, becauſe it was given in former Ages; that is, becauſe I myſelf did not live at the time when it was firſt given. And it would be as reaſonable to plead before a human Tribunal, I will not be governed by any Laws given in former Ages before I was born, nor acknowledge their Authority, tho' I have all the Proofs of their Authority that I can have concerning Laws enacted in former Ages. If any Man ſhould pretend to act thus in the Caſe of human Laws, let him profeſs never ſo much Impartiality, and that he acts to the beſt of his Judgment, or declaim never ſo rhetorically on the Inſufficiency of moral Evidence; I am apt to think, it would hardly hinder his being puniſhed for violating thoſe Laws, except the Court ſhould be ſo kind as to take his making ſuch a Plea for a Proof of his being not right in his Senſes.

This Writer, under pretence of doing honour to Religion and Faith, all along ſuppoſes, that nothing leſs will do, than ſuch an abſolute Certainty as excludes all Poſſibility of Miſtake. That *it is not ſufficient to ſay, there is great Appearance of Probability; there muſt be an abſolute Certainty, without the leaſt Poſſibility of our being diſappointed*

in

in our Security * : Or, as he elſewhere expreſſes it, that *it muſt be ſufficiently calculated to extort an Aſſent from every one that hears it* †. As if no Evidence would be ſufficient in Religion, but one that is plainly irreſiſtible, and forces itſelf upon us whether we will or no. He frequently talks, as if every thing that had not ſuch an abſolute Certainty as to exclude all Poſſibility of the contrary, were for that reaſon *doubtful*, no more than a *precarious Conjecture*, incapable to produce a ſatisfying *Conviction*; when any Man that has ever reflected on the Nature of Evidence at all, muſt be ſenſible, that things may be ſo certain as to leave no room for reaſonable Doubt, that yet are not ſo abſolutely certain as to be without the leaſt Poſſibility of Error.

It will be eaſily allowed, that the greater Certainty any Man attains to in Religion, it is the better, and more likely both to yield him thorough Satisfaction of Mind, and to have a happy Influence upon his Conduct. But it is far from being true, that there can be no right or ſaving Faith, without the higheſt poſſible Degree of Certainty and Aſſurance. That Faith is ſufficient, though mixed with ſome Doubting, where a Man is ſatisfied that he has more convincing Reaſons to believe the Scripture, than any thing that can be brought to the contrary, and when, in conſequence of this, he is prevailed with to ſubmit to its Authority and Laws, and to comply with the Terms of the Goſpel-Covenant. If it were only very probable, that the Chriſtian Religion is of God, it would

* P. 32. † P. 110.

would be both our Duty and our Wiſdom to embrace and receive it, and to govern our Conduct by its excellent Precepts. No Man could run a hazard in ſuch a caſe, by receiving the Goſpel, or at leaſt a hazard equal to what he would run on the other ſide. Suppoſing, by obeying the Laws of the Goſpel, he ſhould deny himſelf ſome Liberties, and controul his Paſſions in the manner that Religion preſcribes, which doth not require us to extirpate the Paſſions, but to govern them, and keep them within proper Bounds; this is no more than what ſome of the greateſt Philoſophers and wiſeſt Men in all Ages have adviſed to, as the beſt way for a Man's own Satisfaction and Tranquillity, and for preſerving Body and Mind in a right Temper. Or, if he ſhould be called to ſuffer Martyrdom, it is a Conduct that Reaſon preſcribes, to ſuffer any temporal Loſſes and Inconveniences, and Death itſelf, even for the Probability of obtaining eternal Happineſs. In other Caſes, Men think it reaſonable to hazard ſome preſent Loſs, and to undergo ſome preſent Hardſhips and Inconveniences on the probable Proſpect of ſome conſiderable Advantage to be procured by it. But where the Advantage propoſed, is ſo infinitely great as the Rewards of Religion, it ought proportionably to have a more powerful Influence. And I think it cannot reaſonably be denied, that the Man that had as great a Certainty of the Truths of Religion, and the important things it ſets before us, as we have of many things that come to us by hiſtorical and moral Evidence, would be utterly inexcuſable, if he did not govern himſelf by its Directions, whatſoever preſent

Inconveniences it might bring upon him: And he would juſtly deſerve to be branded as guilty of the greateſt and moſt criminal Folly, who, to gratify a preſent inordinate Paſſion and Appetite, would run the hazard of expoſing himſelf even to the Probability of ſuch a future Miſery and Puniſhment, as the Goſpel denounces againſt thoſe that perſiſt to indulge themſelves in vicious licentious Courſes.

But beſides all that might be, and often has been offered, concerning the Sufficiency of that Evidence that can be brought for the Goſpel-Revelation, it muſt be farther conſidered, that when all this is accompanied to the Minds of good Men with the Influences of the Holy Spirit, it may well be ſuppoſed to give it a ſtill ſtronger Force. And it is the Doctrine of the holy Scriptures, and there is nothing in it but what is highly agreeable to Reaſon itſelf, that the wiſe and merciful Parent of our Beings, who knows our Weakneſſes and the many Temptations of this preſent State, is ready to communicate his gracious Influences to aſſiſt humble and ſincere Minds, ſenſible of their Dependence upon him, and who apply to him for his Help; which he can eaſily do, in ſuch a way as is perfectly agreeable to the juſt Order of our Natures, and ſo as not to offer Violence to our Faculties, or to the Freedom that belongs to us as reaſonable Creatures, moral Agents, and in ſuch a way as not to render our own Endeavours, or the Exerciſe of our own Reaſon needleſs or uſeleſs. And ſuppoſing ſuch divine Influences neceſſary in the preſent State of Mankind, that the Faith of the Goſpel may have

have its proper Effect upon us, this can by no means be juſtly improved to ſhew that Chriſtianity is not founded on Argument; for in this caſe, all the Argument and rational Evidence brought for it, is ſtill ſuppoſed, and ſtands in all its force: Or, that Reaſon, or the Intellectual Faculty, is not deſigned to lead us into it; for the divine Spirit works by and with Reaſon, or the Intellectual Faculty. The Conviction wrought upon the Mind in this way, is ſtill rational; and it is the Underſtanding that is enlightned and convinced. The Influence of the Spirit of God doth not exclude the Uſe of Reaſon, but ſets the Reaſonableneſs and Excellency of Religion in a more affecting light, and cauſes the Soul more ſtrongly to diſcern the Characters of divine Wiſdom, Goodneſs and Purity, that are in it, and to feel the Power of its Motives: Reaſon therefore, or the Intellectual Faculty, and the Influence of divine Grace, or the Holy Spirit, are not to be oppoſed to one another as inconſiſtent things, but are to be conſidered as in a friendly Conjunction, and the latter is deſigned by God, in his great Goodneſs, to give a farther Degree of Light and Force to the former.

I have now gone through the firſt Part of this Gentleman's Performance; and which, in my opinion, looks the moſt plauſible of any thing he hath offered. The Strength of his Book depends upon the Principles here laid down; and for that reaſon I have conſidered them more largely than at firſt I intended to do. My Letter is already grown to ſuch a Length, that I ſhall not now com-

communicate some further Remarks I have drawn up on other Parts of this extraordinary Pamphlet. I may possibly, if you insist upon it, communicate them to you in another Letter. In the mean time, I am, *&c.*

APRIL 28th,
1743.

FINIS.

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REMARKS on a late Pamphlet, entitled, Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, *&c.*

LETTER II.

SIR,

IT is a ſatisfaction to me, that my former Letter was not diſpleaſing to you; in which, in obedience to your Commands, I communicated to you ſome Remarks that occurred to me upon the Pamphlet that has made ſo much noiſe, *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument.*

In that Letter, after having made ſome general Remarks on the Nature and Tendency of this Pamphlet, I applied my ſelf particularly to conſider the firſt Part of it; in which the Author propoſes to ſhew, that "Reaſon or the Intellectual "Faculty could not poſſibly, both from its own "Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle "intended by God to lead us into a true Faith." Or, in other Words, for this is evidently his Meaning, that God never intended we ſhould make uſe of our Reaſon or Intellectual Faculty in believing, or that our Faith ſhould be founded upon any Evidence that might convince the Underſtanding.

In the ſucceeding Parts of his Pamphlet, he propoſes to prove the ſame thing from Scripture, and to ſhew what is the true Principle of Faith that is there aſſigned.

The firſt thing he offers from Scripture to ſhew that Faith has nothing to do with the Underſtanding, or as he expreſſes it, *p.* 35. that *no Appeal to the Underſtanding was ever made or intended*, is drawn from thoſe Expreſſions, "leſt they ſhould "underſtand with their Hearts——their fooliſh "Heart was darkned——Purified their Hearts by "Faith—" which *Expreſſions*, he obſerves, *are applicable with no Propriety to the Intellectual Faculty, but are evidently deſcriptive of the Will only* *. But a very moderate Acquaintance with the ſacred Writings may ſatisfy any Man, that the Heart is in Scripture-Language often put for the Underſtanding or Intellectual Faculty †. And as to the particular Paſſages referred to by this Writer, that Phraſe of *underſtanding with the Heart* cannot be underſtood ſo as to exclude the intellectual Faculty, but neceſſarily ſuppoſes it. And when it is ſaid of the *Heathens*, that their *fooliſh Heart was darkned*, it is plain this is deſigned to ſignify, that their Underſtanding was darkned, and had not a juſt Knowledge and Diſcernment of Things; tho' it is there alſo ſuppoſed, that the Depravity of their Will and moral Diſpoſitions had a great Influence in corrupting their Judgment. And that Expreſſion of *purifying the Heart by Faith* ſhews indeed that Faith where it is ſincere and of the right kind has a purifying Influence on the Temper and

* P. 36. † 2 Chron. i. 10, 12. Job xxxviii. 36. Eccleſ. viii. 5.

and Diſpoſition of the Soul; but how it can be concluded from thence, that Faith is not a rational Thing, or has nothing to do with the Underſtanding, I cannot ſee.

But our Author chuſes rather to *enlarge upon a Particular, which appears to him entirely uncontrovertible, and that is, the plain narrative Part of the Hiſtory, as far as it relates to the Buſineſs of planting the Goſpel, and the Manner by which it was attempted* *.

Some things that he obſerves upon this Narrative will be eaſily granted him, as, That *Chriſt taught* his Diſciples and the People *as one having Authority*, and that he *conſidered himſelf as the Perſon he was, or one who derived from Heaven the Inſtructions he was communicating.* That he did not deal with his Diſciples in a way of *Sophiſtry and Syllogiſm.* That neither he nor his Apoſtles attempted to prove every ſingle Doctrine they taught, or Precept they delivered, by entering into a tedious Diſcuſſion, or by a long Train of laborious Reaſonings, after the manner of the Schools. But it by no means follows, that becauſe *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles did not convert Men by arguing with them in a philoſophical way, which would have made but little Impreſſion on the Generality of Mankind, who either have not capacity to underſtand, or leiſure to attend to a Courſe of nice and ſubtil Argumentation, that therefore they expected or required Men to believe without any Reaſon or Evidence at all, which is the Repreſentation this Gentleman is pleaſed to make of it. On

* P. 36.

the contrary, it is manifeſt from the Account given us in Scripture, that as they propoſed the Doctrines and Laws they delivered to Mankind, in the Name and as by the Authority of God himſelf, which gave them another kind of Force than the mere Reaſonings of Philoſophers would have done; ſo they gave the World the moſt convincing Proofs that they were indeed ſent of God, and that they received the Doctrines and Laws they delivered, by Revelation from him. In which caſe Reaſon and common Senſe directed Men to believe thoſe Doctrines and ſubmit to thoſe Laws. For it is the Voice of Nature and Reaſon, that if God gives a Revelation to Mankind, what is there taught and enjoined, ought to be believed and received upon his Authority, provided we have ſufficient Proofs to convince us that ſuch a Revelation came from God.

But to return to our Author's Account of the Goſpel-Narrative, the Sum of it is this; That *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles required Men to believe at once without Reaſon or Evidence, and pronounced Damnation againſt them if they did not. That *Chriſt* did not *lay the Proofs of his Miſſion frankly before his Diſciples, nor give them time calmly to conſider them*; and that he refuſed to *explain himſelf* to them when they wanted it, and diſcouraged their *Enquiries*. That he required thoſe that came to him to be healed, to believe before he healed them, which plainly ſhews, that *the Conviction was to precede the Evidence, as the Terms of the Favour to be conſequently conferred* *. That he *ever*

* P. 36, 37.

ever diſclaimed with the utmoſt Reſentment ſuch Followers as were deſirous to canvaſs the Evidence, and diſcouraged no Temper with ſo conſtant an Averſion, as that of ſeeking a Sign *. And whereas it might be alledged, that he produced his Miracles as Evidences of his divine Miſſion, our Author affirms and endeavours after his Manner to ſhew, that he had *no Intention to prove his Truth and Character* by thoſe Works †. That he both *expected* and *accepted the ſudden Converſion of many upon little or no ſeeming Evidence*; and nothing was of *greater Merit* than an *extempore Subſcription.* And that he *rejected ſome Perſons immediately when they had not Minds prepared to believe at once, and gave them up inſtantly to the Hardneſs of their Hearts without Remedy* ‖. That the Apoſtles did all *along tread punctually in their Maſter's Steps, inſiſting conſtantly on the ready Acknowledgement of their Doctrines, without any Conceſſions of Time for Doubt or Deliberation.* And that *of the Terms of the Covenant one Declaration was often thought ſufficient, and the leaſt ſtanding off gave up the Unbeliever to Reprobation* ‡. That it was required of thoſe to whom the Goſpel was preached, that *they ſhould not one Moment withhold their Aſſent,* and that the Apoſtles very *juſtly expected to make their Converts with a Word's ſpeaking* **. That their Office was only to *circulate their Creeds*; *they were not ſent to diſpute, but to preach.* And that in like manner the *Directions* they gave to *their deputed Succeſſors* was not to

* P. 38, 49. † P. 48—50. ‖ P. 37, 65, 66, 67. ‡ P. 38. ** P. 42

to *confute* or *argue* with thoſe whom they were to receive to the Faith *.

Such is the Repreſentation this Gentleman is pleaſed to make, and which he pretends is plain from the ſacred Hiſtory, of the Method made uſe of by our Saviour and his Apoſtles in *planting the Goſpel*. Let us now ſee from *Chriſt*'s own Declarations, and from the Hiſtory of the Goſpel and the Acts of the Apoſtles, whether this Account be true. After which I ſhall take notice, as far as it may be neceſſary, of the Inſtances produced by this Writer to ſupport the Account he gives.

With regard to our Saviour himſelf, he was ſo far from requiring Men to believe on his bare Word without Proof, that he declared, *if I bear witneſs of my ſelf*, that is, if I have no other Evidence but my bare Word, *my Witneſs is not* true †. He encouraged Examination and Enquiry, *Search the Scriptures*, ſaid he to the *Jews*, *for they are they which teſtify of me* ‖. Inſtead of forbidding them to judge fairly and impartially, and to uſe their Underſtandings, he expoſtulates with them for not doing ſo. *Why even of your ſelves judge ye not that which is right? Judge not according to Appearance, but judge righteous Judgment* **. The Faith he approves is founded in the Underſtanding. He deſcribes the good Hearer of the Word to be one that *heareth the Word and underſtandeth it, which alſo beareth Fruit* ‡. In his Diſcourſe to the *Jews*, he frequently appeals to the illuſtrious Atteſtations that were given him, and the

* P. 39, 40. † John v. 31. ‖ John v. 39. ** Luke xii. 54—57. John vii. 24. ‡ Matt. xiii. 23.

the manifeſt Proofs he exhibited of his divine *Miſſion*. Thus, after having ſpoken of the remarkable Teſtimony given him by *John* the Baptiſt, he adds, *but I have a greater Witneſs than that of* John: *for the Works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame Works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me* *. And again, *If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, tho' ye believe not me, believe the Works, that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him* †. And, ſpeaking of the *Jews* and *Phariſees* that did not believe in him, he ſaith, *If I had not come and ſpoken unto them, they had not had Sin, but now they have no Cloke for their Sin*; and then adds, *If I had not done among them the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin* ‖. Where he evidently ſuppoſes, that his Works bore Teſtimony to his Doctrine and divine Miſſion; and that they were Proofs ſo ſtrong and convincing, as left them utterly without Excuſe in their Unbelief. And this may help us to judge of the Sincerity and Candour of this Writer, who confidently affirms, in expreſs Contradiction to our Saviour's own Declarations, that he had not *any ſuch Meaning or Intention to convince Perſons*, or *to prove his own Truth and Character by his Works*; and inſinuates, that he was not *ſollicitous to gain Proſelytes by ſuch Means*, and was *conſcious he had nothing of that kind to produce*. P. 49, 50.

What

* John v. 36, 37.
† John x. 24, 37, 38. xiv. 10, 11.
‖ John xv. 22, 24.

What the Method was that was taken after our Lord's Aſcenſion to propagate the Chriſtian Faith, we have a full Account in the Acts of the Apoſtles. That Book opens with an admirable Diſcourſe of the Apoſtle *Peter* to the *Jews* on the Day of Pentecoſt, in which he reaſons ſtrongly from the holy Scriptures, and from the extraordinary divine Atteſtations given from Heaven, to convince the *Jews*, that *Jeſus*, whom they had crucified, was Lord and Chriſt. And we have an Account of ſeveral other excellent Diſcourſes of his in that ſacred Book. Concerning *Stephen* the firſt Martyr, we are told, that as he *did great Wonders and Miracles among the People*, ſo when ſeveral of the *Jews diſputed with him, they were not able to reſiſt the Spirit and Wiſdom, with which he ſpake* *. He was therefore able to give good Reaſons for the Faith, and ſuch as they could not confute. St. *Paul laboured more abundantly* than any of the other Apoſtles in ſpreading the Faith of the Goſpel, and what his uſual manner was we are informed *Acts* xvii. 2, 3. where we are told, that at *Theſſalonica, Paul, as his manner was, went into the Synagogue of the* Jews, *and three Sabbath-days he reaſoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging, that Chriſt muſt needs have ſuffered, and riſen again from the Dead, and that this* Jeſus, *whom I preach unto you, is the Chriſt.* Here it is plain, quite contrary to the Repreſentation made by our Author, that his manner of making Converts was not to urge them to believe without a Reaſon for it, but ſtrongly to reaſon with them, in

* Acts vi. 9, 10.

in order to convince them. The Account that is there given of the *Bereæans* is very remarkable. *Paul* and *Silas* went into the Synagogue to preach to them, and reaſon with them, as they had done at *Theſſalonica*. And it is obſerved by the ſacred Hiſtorian, that *they were more noble than thoſe at* Theſſalonica, *in that they received the Word with all Readineſs of Mind*; that is, without Prejudice, and with Minds open to Conviction, *and ſearched the Scriptures daily, whether thoſe Things were ſo.* And what was the Conſequence? *Therefore many of them believed* *. Here it appears, that the Apoſtles were far from being Enemies to a free and fair Enquiry. The *Bereæans* are commended for taking pains to examine, and the reſult of their impartial Examination was their embracing the Chriſtian Faith. In the ſame Chapter we find St. *Paul* at *Athens* diſputing and reaſoning with the *Athenians* in an excellent manner. At *Corinth* he *reaſoned in the Synagogue every Sabbath, and perſuaded the* Jews *and the* Greeks; and he *continued there a Year and ſix Months, teaching the Word of God among them* †. What needed he have ſtaid ſo long there, if, according to this Gentleman's Repreſentation, the Apoſtles expected to make their Converts with a Word's ſpeaking, and never allowed *Time* for examining or deliberating concerning the Evidences of Chriſtianity? And it was in conſequence of his taking ſo much time in teaching and inſtructing them in the Faith, that he erected that flouriſhing Church of the *Corinthians*. And before this we are told,

* Acts xvii 10, 11, 12. † Acts xviii 4, 11.

that *Paul* and *Barnabas abode a long time at* Iconium, *ſpeaking boldly in the Lord, which gave teſtimony unto the Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by their hands* *. At *Epheſus* he *went into the Synagogue, and ſpake boldly for the ſpace of three Months, diſputing and perſuading the Things concerning the Kingdom of God.* And afterwards, he *diſputed daily in the School of one* Tyrannus; and thus *continued by the ſpace of two Years; ſo that all they which dwelt in* Aſia, *heard the Word of the Lord* Jeſus, *both* Jews *and* Greeks. And how aſſiduous he was all that time in inſtructing them, appears from his Appeal to the Elders of *Epheſus* in his admirable Speech to them. And in conſequence of all this, of ſuch aſſiduous teaching, and reaſoning, accompanied with the moſt glorious miraculous Atteſtations, it is obſerved there were great Numbers brought to the Chriſtian Faith. *So mightily*, ſays the ſacred Hiſtorian, *grew the Word of God, and prevailed* †. That theſe were the Methods made uſe of for ſpreading the Faith of Chriſt, farther appears from the Epiſtles St. *Paul* writ to the Churches he had planted. Thoſe Epiſtles are every where full of Reaſonings, and his manner of addreſſing the Chriſtian Converts on many occaſions, ſufficiently ſhews how far he was from deſiring a blind Faith without Underſtanding: *In Malice be ye Children, but in Underſtanding be ye Men. Be ye not unwiſe, but underſtanding what the Will of the Lord is. I ſpeak as to wiſe Men, judge ye what I ſay. Prove or try all things, hold*

* Acts xiv. 1, 2. † Acts xix. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20.

hold fast that which is good *. Is this the Language of a Man that thought believing the Gospel was inconsistent with Examination and Enquiry, and had nothing to do with the Understanding? and that Persons were not to know why they believed, and upon what Grounds? When the Apostle *Peter* urges the Believers to whom he writes, to be *ready always to give an Answer to every Man that* should *ask* them a *Reason of the Hope that is in them, with Meekness and Fear* †, *i. e.* with Modesty and Gravity; this certainly supposes, that they themselves had reason for believing, and that they were able to give an Account of it to others too. And whereas this Writer insinuates, that as the Apostles never argued themselves, so they left Instructions to their Successors never to dispute or argue; this is so far from being true, that the Apostle insists upon it as a proper Qualification of a Teacher of the Gospel, that he should be *able by sound Doctrine both to exhort and to convince the Gainsayers* ||. Nor were they to give them up at once to immediate Reprobation, but to reason with them with Meekness and Temper. *The Servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient, in Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves* ‡. The same Apostle speaking of the false Teachers, represents them as *understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm*; and as *knowing nothing* **. Where it is plainly intimated, that the Faith of the true Christian Teachers and Apostles

* 1 Cor. x. 15. xiv. 20. Eph. v. 17. 1 Thess. v. 21.
† 1 Pet. iii. 15. || Tit. i. 9. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.
** 1 Tim. i. 7. vi. 4.

was joined with Underſtanding; they underſtood what they believed and what they taught; and the contrary was the Reproach of the falſe Teachers, whereby they were to be diſtinguiſhed from the true.

And now I think, upon an impartial View of theſe ſeveral Paſſages, to which many others might be added, if it were neceſſary, it appears with the greateſt Evidence, that the Method the Apoſtles made uſe of, as their Lord and Maſter had done before them, to bring Perſons to the Faith of the Goſpel, was by aſſiduous Inſtruction, at the ſame time producing the moſt illuſtrious Credentials of their Divine Miſſion. Neither Chriſt nor his Apoſtles ever required Perſons to believe without Evidence ſufficient to make their Aſſent rational. Nor is it true, as this Writer repreſents it, that the firſt Publiſhers of Chriſtianity never *diſputed* or *reaſoned* with thoſe whom they expected to convert to the Faith of Chriſt; on the contrary it appears with the cleareſt Evidence from the Paſſages already produced, that it was their uſual way to reaſon with Men, in order to convert them to the Faith. If they did not diſpute according to the artificial Method of the Schools, yet they always uſed Arguments ſufficient to induce a reaſonable Aſſent; and to convince thoſe whom they required to believe. They reaſoned with the Heathens concerning the Abſurdity of their Idolatry, *Acts* xiv. 15—18. xvii. 22—31. With the *Jews* and Proſelytes of the Gate they reaſoned out of the Holy Scriptures; and both before *Jews* and *Gentiles* they laid the ſtrongeſt Evidence to engage

engage them to believe, ariſing from what Chriſt himſelf had done, his holy Life, his illuſtrious Miracles, and eſpecially his Reſurrection from the Dead, and the extraordinary Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, of which they were Witneſſes. And God confirmed their Teſtimony by the many glorious Miracles they performed in the Name of a riſen *Jeſus*, and by the Gifts of the Spirit with which they were endued. And theſe together formed an Evidence ſtrong and convincing, an Evidence perfectly agreeable to Reaſon, and the common Senſe of Mankind, and which was much quicker in its Operations than a tedious Proceſs of abſtracted Reaſonings could have been. Upon the whole it is manifeſt, that the Apoſtles had no worldly Advantages of any kind to recommend them. It was by force of Evidence, the Purity and Excellency of their Doctrine, the Holineſs of their Lives, their unſhaken Conſtancy and Zeal in profeſſing the Truth, and the many illuſtrious Proofs they gave of their Divine Miſſion, that they prevailed with thoſe who were willing impartially to conſider their Doctrine, and the Proofs whereby it was atteſted. It was by Argument, and the glorious convincing Evidence with which it was accompanied, that Chriſtianity made ſuch an amazing Progreſs; to which the *Jews* at firſt, and the Heathens afterwards, had little to oppoſe beſides bitter Calumnies, Reproaches, and Perſecutions.

And now it may be ſafely left to any Man of common Underſtanding to compare this Account with that given by this Writer, and ſee which of them is moſt agreeable to Truth and Candour, and

to

to the ſacred Records. But tho' this general Anſwer might be ſufficient, it will be proper to enter into a particular Diſcuſſion of the ſeveral Things produced by him to ſhew that our Saviour and his Apoſtles never appealed to the Underſtandings of Men, and that they required them to believe without Reaſon or Evidence. I am apprehenſive this Part of my Remarks will prove tedious to you, as it has been to myſelf. For to be obliged to detect a Succeſſion of groſs Miſrepreſentations, and to conſider a great Variety of Paſſages, which have little Connexion with one another, leads one into a Detail that yields little Entertainment, either to the Writer or to the Reader.

He firſt aſks, "Did our Saviour lay the Arguments and Proofs of his Miſſion frankly before his Diſciples, and then give them time to conſider calmly of their Force, and Liberty to determine thereon as their Reaſon ſhould direct them?" If his Meaning be, that our Saviour, after laying the Proofs of his Miſſion before his Diſciples, ſhould have left them entirely at liberty to receive or reject him as they thought fit; I readily own, that he did not do this. For what could be more abſurd, than firſt to lay before them the evident Proofs that he was ſent from God for the moſt important Purpoſes, and then let them know that they might with equal Innocence receive or reject him? But the Method he took was the wiſeſt and propereſt that could be, and ſuch as left room for Deliberation and thorough Conviction. He gave his Diſciples many Opportunities of converſing with him, and hearing his admirable

rable Diſcourſes, and of obſerving the Holineſs of his Life, the Excellency of his Doctrine, and the many wonderful Works he performed, Works far tranſcending all human Power. And it was not till above a Year after their firſt coming to him, and after they had all the Opportunities that could be deſired of being inſtructed, and fully ſatisfied of his divine Miſſion, that he ſolemnly called the twelve to be his Apoſtles. And it was again a conſiderable time after this, that he ſent them forth to preach in his Name; and the Powers he then gave them of performing the moſt illuſtrious Miracles, muſt needs have been an additional mighty Confirmation of their Faith in him. And after this his Reſurrection from the Dead, of which they were convinced by *many infallible Proofs*, and the farther Inſtructions he then gave them; his Aſcenſion into Heaven, of which they were Eye-Witneſſes; the extraordinary Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, and the miraculous Powers and ſpiritual Gifts with which they were endued, according to his own Prediction and Promiſe; all this taken together, rendered the Evidence compleat, and fully convinced them that *Chriſt* was the divine Perſon he profeſſed himſelf to be, and that the Religion he taught was from God. And this Evidence they laid before others, as ſufficient to convince them too.

But our Author farther urges, that *Chriſt* "did "but ill approve the being called on upon any Oc- "caſion to explain himſelf, and therefore his Diſ- "ciples were fearful at every turn of giving of- "fence, and incurring Reproof by any farther "Enquiry,

" Enquiry, even at times when they did not really " apprehend his Meaning *." This is ſo far from being true, that on the contrary, it is manifeſt from the Accounts given by the Evangeliſts, that he encouraged them to aſk him for Information, and ſhewed himſelf well pleaſed when they did ſo. And ſo forward was he to inform them, that he took occaſion to explain Things to them even without their aſking †. The only Paſſage that ſeems to give the leaſt countenance to this Pretence is, that when he *taught his Diſciples, and ſaid, that the Son of Man is to be delivered into the Hands of Men, and they ſhall kill him, and after that he is killed, he ſhall riſe the third Day*; we are told, *they underſtood not that Saying, and were afraid to aſk him* ‖. But all that can be gather'd from this is, not that *Chriſt* was unwilling to inform them; for the Inſtructions he then gave them were as plain as Words could be, that he was to ſuffer, and die, and riſe again; or that they were in general afraid to apply to him for explaining himſelf; but that with regard to that particular Subject, the Sufferings of the Meſſiah, they were under the Power of the ſtrongeſt Prejudices; and that it was a thing ſo contrary to their Notions and Expectations, that they were loth to believe and hear of it. And accordingly, St. *Matthew* ſpeaking of the ſame thing, tells us, they were *exceeding ſorry* **. They would all have been willing to explain themſelves, as *Peter* had done on a former occaſion, who underſtood what our Lord had

* P. 3-. † Matt. xiii. 18, 36, 3-, 51. Mark iv. 34. Mat. xvi. 6—12 John xvi. 18, 19, &c. ‖ Mark ix. 31, 32. Luke ix. 45. ** Matt. xvii. 23.

had ſaid well enough, which was exceeding plain, but could not reconcile it to his own Notions, *Far be it from thee, Lord, this ſhall not be unto thee.* But as they knew the Rebuke that had been given to *Peter*, they were afraid of making any farther Enquiries on a Subject ſo ungrateful to them.

As our Author thinks proper to repreſent our Saviour as unwilling to inform his own Diſciples, when they deſired it, ſo he obſerves, "That he ſighed deeply at the Perverſeneſs of "the *Phariſees* in aſking a *Sign*, i. e. ſome "Teſtimonial of the Truth of his declared Miſ"ſion, and ſtiled them a fooliſh and perverſe "Generation for their Preſumption; tho' if he "had appealed to their Underſtanding, it had "been ſo far from being criminal, that it had "been their indiſpenſable Duty *." And he is ſo fond of this Inſtance, that he has it over again, *p.* 49. But our Saviour well knew that their demanding a Sign did not proceed from a teachable Diſpoſition, or an honeſt Openneſs to Conviction, (in which caſe he would certainly have encouraged it) but from a petulant cavilling Temper of Mind, which therefore he juſtly reproved. And what ſufficiently ſhew'd this was, that they called for a Sign from him, after he had for a conſiderable time wrought, and was then working a great number of illuſtrious Miracles, of many of which the *Phariſees* themſelves had been Eye-Witneſſes, and had moſt perverſely

* P. 38.

perverſely attributed them to the Aſſiſtance of *Beelzebub* the Prince of the Devils: and when after all this they came and aſked of him a Sign, as if he had not wrought any Miracles among them before, juſtly did he ſhew a Reſentment of ſuch Perverſeneſs. But tho' he did not think fit at that time to gratify their peeviſh Demands, or to humour a Temper that is never ſatisfied with preſent Evidence, but is always unreaſonably demanding more; yet after this he ſtill continued in the moſt open manner, and in the view of his Enemies themſelves, to perform the moſt ſtupendous Miracles, and which were really as great as they themſelves could have deſired; and at that very time he referred them to that which was to be the ultimate confirming Evidence of his divine Miſſion, his own Reſurrection from the Dead; which was attended and followed with ſuch Circumſtances, as rendered it in the propereſt ſenſe what the *Phariſees* demanded, *a Sign from Heaven.*

It is with the ſame Candour, that this Gentleman repreſents our Saviour as *rejecting ſome Perſons immediately*, becauſe they did not believe at once, and as *giving them up inſtantly to the Hardneſs of their Hearts without remedy, depriving them judicially even of the moſt common Advantages——He did not many mighty Works there, becauſe of their Unbelief, which rather ſhould have been the reaſon of his multiplying them.* The Inſtance he here refers to, is our Saviour's Conduct towards his own Countrymen

men of *Nazareth*. And on this occaſion he gives out ſome Inſinuations againſt the *long-ſuffering Character* of the bleſſed *Jeſus*, as if it were very *ſevere to reprobate by ſo ſhort a Proceſs for Heſitation, thoſe whom perhaps ſome additional Circumſtance of Power had brought to a proper Temper and Obedience* *. It appears from the whole of *Chriſt*'s Behaviour during the Courſe of his perſonal Miniſtry, how patient and long-ſuffering he was. He went about teaching and preaching the Things of the Kingdom of God, notwithſtanding the Oppoſition and ill Treatment he met with, ſtill repeating his excellent Inſtructions and beneficent Miracles, and with great Tenderneſs bearing with their Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs. How admirably does he expreſs this Temper, in thoſe pathetical Words, *Oh Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem,——how often would I have gathered thy Children together, as a Hen doth gather her Brood under her Wings, but ye would not!* † We may be ſure therefore, that his Conduct towards the People of *Nazareth* was not owing to any want of *Long-ſuffering*; and that if a *tardy Genius* and *innocent Scruples*, as this Writer phraſes it, had been the only Impediments, our Lord would have continued to indulge a *patient Attendance*. But it muſt be conſidered, that the firſt time he went to preach among them, which was after his Fame had ſpread throughout all *Galilee*, they attempted to murder him ‖. Notwithſtanding which, he

* P. 66, 67. † Luke xiii. 34. ‖ Luke iv. 14, 16, 29.

went again a conſiderable time after, when the Fame of his great Wiſdom and Miracles was ſtill better eſtabliſhed, and he did then perform ſome mighty Works among them. But inſtead of being duly affected with his excellent Diſcourſes and with his Miracles, they only reflected on the Meanneſs of his Parentage and worldly Circumſtances *. And therefore his not performing many mighty Works among them was owing to the juſt Knowledge he had of their irreclaimable Obſtinacy, which both might be gathered from their Conduct, and which he was well aſſured of, as he had the power of diſcerning the Spirits of Men. For, as the Evangeliſt obſerves, *he needed not that any ſhould teſtify of Man: for he knew what was in Man* †.

If *Chriſt* ordered his Diſciples to *ſhake off the Duſt of their Feet, as a Teſtimony* againſt a City that would not *receive* them, or *hearken to* them (which is another thing our Author refers to ‖,) it was not his intention they ſhould do it, till after having tried all proper Methods, and till it appeared they were plainly incorrigible. So the Apoſtles underſtood and practiſed his Directions. *Paul* and *Barnabas ſhook off the Duſt of their Feet* againſt the *Jews* at *Antioch* in *Piſidia*; but it was not till after they not only *contradicted* and *blaſphemed*, but *ſtirred up the chief Men of the City, and raiſed Perſecution againſt* Paul *and* Barnabas, *and expelled them out of their Coaſts* **.

Another

* Matt. xiii 54—58. Mark vi. 2, 3. † Joh. ii. 25. ‖ P. 39.
** Acts xiii. 45, 50, 51.

Another Inſtance we have with regard to the *Jews* at *Corinth*: *Paul ſhook his Raiment, and ſaid unto them, your Blood be upon your own Heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the* Gentiles. But this was not, till after he had for a conſiderable time together *reaſoned in the Synagogue every Sabbath*; and they not only *oppoſed themſelves*, but *blaſphemed*, i. e. manifeſted ſuch a malicious and ſpiteful Oppoſition, breaking forth into Reproaches and Blaſphemies againſt the Name of *Jeſus*, that it plainly appeared, it was in vain to ſtrive with them any longer. He therefore choſe that way of teſtifying that he had diſcharged his Duty, and that the Guilt would be chargeable only upon themſelves *.

But what this Gentleman ſeems to lay the principal ſtreſs upon is, that our Saviour required Perſons to believe in an Inſtant, before any Evidence given. To this purpoſe he obſerves, that it was his Language before he wrought his Miracles, *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* "The Conviction was to precede the Evidence, "as the Terms of the Favour to be conſequent-"ly conferred †." The Caſe where our Lord uſed theſe Expreſſions, is that of the two blind Men that came to him, ſaying, *Thou Son of* David (a Character by which the Meſſiah was then uſually diſtinguiſhed) *have mercy upon us.* This Confeſſion they made voluntarily without his requiring it, and it was undoubtedly founded upon

* Acts xviii 4, 5, 6. † P. 37, 49, 50.

upon what they had heard of his illuſtrious Miracles and wiſe Diſcourſes, the Fame of which had ſpread abroad through all *Judea* and *Galilee*. It was therefore with great Propriety that our Saviour put that Queſtion to them, *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* And upon their declaring they did, *touched their Eyes and ſaid, According to your Faith be it unto you* *. This was not a requiring thoſe to believe who did not believe before, and that in an Inſtant and without Evidence, as this Writer is pleaſed to repreſent it; but it was an approving the Faith they already had, and a giving farther Evidence to confirm and eſtabliſh it. And in general, it holds true with regard to every Caſe recorded in the Goſpel, in which *Chriſt* required thoſe that came to him to be healed, to declare their Belief in him, that they were Perſons that had ſome Faith in him before. And the Deſign of his requiring them to believe was in effect no more than this, to engage them to make a Profeſſion of their Faith before others, or to encourage them to perſiſt in believing, when he ſaw their Faith began to ſtagger thro' extraordinary Difficulties and Trials; as in the caſe of *Jairus*, and the Father of the young Man whom the Diſciples could not relieve †. And then upon their declaring they believed, he wrought his Miracles upon them, the more ſignificantly to ſhew, what this Gentleman thinks fit to deny, that his Miracles were deſigned and wrought as Proofs of

* Matt. ix. 27, 28, 29. † Mark v. 36. ix. 23, 24.

of his divine Miſſion. And this alſo is the deſign of thoſe Expreſſions he ſometimes makes uſe of, after he had wrought the miraculous Cure; *Thy Faith hath ſaved thee*; *thy Faith hath made thee whole.* He hereby ſignified his Approbation of the Faith they had ſhewn, and directed their Views to that which was the main Deſign of his Miracles, *viz.* to confirm their Faith in him, and bear teſtimony to his Miſſion. And yet it is far from being true, what this Gentleman expreſſly affirms, that our Saviour *conſtantly ſtipulated for no ordinary degree of Perſuaſion beforehand*; from whence he infers, that they *owed the whole Efficacy of their Cure to their Faith.* For nothing is more certain than that with regard to the far greater part of the Miracles he wrought he did not ſtipulate for Faith beforehand. Inſtances of which ſee referred to in the Margin, to which many more might eaſily be added *. This ſhews how little credit is due to a Writer that is capable of endeavouring to impoſe ſo palpable a Falſhood upon his Reader, even when he pretends to give an exact and faithful Narrative of our Saviour's Proceedings.

The Inſtance he mentions, p. 65. of our Saviour's Command to *Matthew* to *follow* him, is not an Inſtance of a Command to a Man that did not believe before, to believe in an Inſtant, and without Evidence; but of a Command to a Man

* John v. 12, 13, 14. John ix. 6, 7, 11. Matt. xii. 13. Luke vii. 13, 14. xiv. 2, 4. xxii. 5.

Man that already believed, to follow him as one of his immediate Diſciples and Attendants. Nor is it true, that *Matthew precipitately deſerted a beneficial Employment for he knew not whom.* For he well knew who *Jeſus* was, as he lived at *Capernaum*, where Chriſt chiefly had his Reſidence, and performed many of his mighty Works, and delivered many of his excellent Diſcourſes. Our Author ſeems aware of this, and therefore urges, "That it is likely, if "what he had ſeen before had diſpoſed him to "Diſcipleſhip, he would have had the Merit "of engaging voluntarily in the Service, without waiting for a particular Addreſs." But this does not follow. Suppoſing him ever ſo well diſpoſed, he might queſtion, whether, as he was a Publican, Chriſt would take him among the number of thoſe Diſciples that were conſtantly to attend him, conſidering the common Prejudices againſt Perſons of that Character. But when he heard Chriſt himſelf particularly calling him to follow him, he gladly accepted the Invitation, and preferred the being his conſtant Attendant to his gainful Employment. There is nothing in all this but what may reaſonably be accounted for.

As to the Inſtance of the *Samaritans, who it ſeems had never heard of Chriſt before, and yet believed on him readily for the Saying* of the Woman: *A notable Foundation truly for Confidence and Conviction, and perhaps for Martyrdom!*

tyrdom! * In this caſe, there is no Command of our Saviour enjoining the *Samaritans* to believe. The Fact only is related, that they did believe. Nor is this their believing to be underſtood of a complete and perfect Faith, as our Author is pleas'd to repreſent it in this, and all the other Caſes he mentions. It is evident to any one that is acquainted with the Language of the New Teſtament, that Believing is there frequently to be underſtood of a Faith but juſt begun, and which was as yet very imperfect, and far from being well eſtabliſhed †. So it is to be underſtood, when it is ſaid of ſome of the *Samaritans*, that they *believed on him for the Saying of the Woman.* The Account ſhe gave them of his having diſcovered to her the moſt ſecret Tranſactions of her Life, as well as of his wiſe and excellent Diſcourſe, inclined them to believe in him. This was the firſt occaſion, or beginning of their believing. But their Faith was afterwards mightily confirmed, and received great Acceſſions from their perſonal Converſation with him, and the admirable Inſtructions he gave them in a manner far exceeding whatever they had heard before. This added to the Proof he had given of a wonderful and ſupernatural Knowledge, led them to conclude, that he was the Chriſt, whom they, as well as the *Jews*, were then in ſtrong Expectation of. And they ſeem to have had juſter Notions of the

* P. 66. † John ii. 23, 24 vi. 66 vii. 31 Acts viii. 13.

Deſign of the Meſſiah's coming than the *Jews* themſelves, and not to have been ſo intoxicated with the Notions of his temporal Glory and Grandeur, as appears from their calling him the *Saviour of the World*; and from the Declaration made by the Woman, *I know that Meſſiah cometh, when he is come, he will tell us all Things.*

But if our Saviour had not required Men to believe inſtantly, and without giving them time for Deliberation, would he have called his Diſciples *Fools, and ſlow of heart to believe! becauſe a Narrative of four Hours had not wrought a thorough Conviction* * ? The Paſſage here referred to is in *Luke* xxiv. 25. with regard to which it muſt be conſidered, that the Perſons our Saviour here reproves were of the number of thoſe Diſciples that conſtantly attended him. And what he reproves them for, was their not underſtanding that Chriſt *ought to ſuffer* before he *entred into his Glory.* This was not the firſt time he had propoſed theſe ſacred Truths to them; he had done it at ſeveral times before in the plaineſt manner †. He had juſt reaſon therefore to reproach them for their *Fooliſhneſs* or *Inconſideration*, for that is the proper Signification of the Word there uſed, and their *Slowneſs*; which was not owing to a natural Defect in their Underſtanding, but to their culpable Prejudices, and to a Neglect of improving the Inſtructions that had been given them.

* P. 66. † Matt. xvi. 21. xvii. 22, 23. xx. 17, 18, 19.

them. And now again after his Reſurrection he took pains to *open* to them *the Scriptures*, and make them *underſtand* them, ver. 27, 32. which would have been needleſs, if, as this Gentleman inſinuates, Believing had nothing to do with the Underſtanding.

Our Author mentions ſome other Inſtances of ſudden Converſions, which relate not directly to the time of our Saviour, but of his Apoſtles, to ſhew that they alſo required Men to believe in an inſtant, without any *Conceſſions of Time for Deliberation*. Thus he obſerves, that the "Eunuch was the Proſelyte of a ſhort Stage, "inſtructed in one Hour, and baptized the "next." p. 39. But ſuppoſing what is very probable, that the Eunuch had heard a great deal at *Jeruſalem*, from whence he was then returning, concerning *Jeſus*, and the Miracles wrought by him; and after his Death by his Diſciples, who teſtified that he was riſen from the dead, and confirmed their Teſtimony by the moſt illuſtrious Atteſtations, he might be well prepared for Inſtruction. And when things were more diſtinctly explained to him by *Philip*, and the Eunuch's Prejudices were removed, by convincing him from that Prophecy in *Iſaiah*, that the Meſſiah was to undergo many and grievous Sufferings; the Suddenneſs of his Converſion is very conſiſtent with his having a rational Conviction of the Truth of our Saviour's Miſſion. It was to his Underſtanding that *Philip* addreſs'd himſelf, *Underſtandeſt thou*

what thou readeſt? Nor did he, after inſtructing him, require him to believe without delay; but the Eunuch himſelf made the Propoſal to be baptized, and voluntarily declared his Belief, that *Jeſus Chriſt* was *the Son of God.*

But perhaps it is more to the Author's purpoſe, what he obſerves, that " whole Congre-" gations were often gained over at a hearing, " and Thouſands at a time actually convinced " by a ſingle Lecture." I ſuppoſe, he particularly refers to the three thouſand that were converted at St. *Peter*'s firſt Sermon on the Day of Pentecoſt. And it muſt be acknowledg'd, that this is very remarkable; but no Proof that their Faith was not reaſonable, or without ſufficient convincing Evidence. Let us take the caſe as it really was in all its Circumſtances. It was well known to the *Jews* that *Jeſus* had performed among them for ſome Years together the moſt aſtoniſhing Miracles; for the Truth of which St. *Peter* here appeals to themſelves, as Facts that could not be conteſted. They knew his holy Life, and had heard his wiſe and excellent Diſcourſes, and a conſiderable number of them had from time to time been brought to believe *, tho' their Faith was far from being well eſtabliſhed. And after he had been ſeized and condemned by the Authority of their great Council, many of them were prevailed upon by the chief Prieſts, Rulers, and Phariſees, to conſent

* See to this purpoſe John ii. 23. vii. 31, 40, 41. x. 41, 42. xi. 45. Luke vii. 16. Matt. xxi. 46.

ſent to his being crucified, which St. *Peter* therefore charges home upon them as their Guilt. They had afterwards been Witneſſes to the preternatural Darkneſs, the Earthquake, and other extraordinary things that happened at his Crucifixion, and which made a mighty Impreſſion on many of the People *. They knew that his Diſciples teſtified that he was riſen again from the dead, and they themſelves were now Witneſſes of the wonderful Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon his Diſciples, and were convinced, by what they heard and ſaw, of the Truth and Reality of it, and that it was a thing which far exceeded all human Power, and carried in it the ſtrongeſt Evidences of a divine Interpoſition. This ſatisfied them, that the Teſtimony the Apoſtles gave of Chriſt's Reſurrection and Exaltation was true, and that therefore he was the promiſed Saviour; eſpecially as the Apoſtle *Peter* ſhewed that all this was perfectly agreeable to the Predictions of the Prophets concerning him. In ſuch an extraordinary Concurrence of Circumſtances the Conviction wrought upon them was ſpeedy, but very reaſonable, and founded upon ſufficient Evidence. The ſame Obſervation may be made with regard to the Numbers that were converted afterwards on occaſion of another Diſcourſe of St. *Peter*. They had juſt ſeen a moſt aſtoniſhing Miracle performed by *Peter* and *John* in reſtoring a Man whom they all knew to have been lame from his Mother's Womb,

* Luke xxiii 47, 48.

Womb, by only bidding him in the Name of *Jeſus* riſe up and walk: No wonder that this, together with the Apoſtle's excellent Diſcourſe, added to what had ſo lately happened at the day of Pentecoſt, which was then freſh in memory, and to what they obſerv'd concerning the exemplary Lives, the Piety and Charity of the firſt Believers, brought over to the Faith many that probably were very favourably diſpoſed before; but were now, by this additional Evidence, fully convinced. Beſides all which, we may well ſuppoſe there was an extraordinary Preſence and Influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Minds of Men, communicated for the more ſpeedy and effectual ſpreading of the Goſpel at its firſt Publication; and which was a farther illuſtrious Proof of its divine Original, and of the Approbation of Heaven. Upon the whole, all that can be juſtly concluded from the numerous and ſudden Converſions at the firſt Publication of the Goſpel, is not that Chriſtianity is not founded on Argument, or that the firſt Believers had no Reaſon or Evidence for their believing; but that the Evidence was ſo ſtrong and convincing, and came upon them with ſuch an over-powering Light and Force, as made a much quicker Progreſs than mere abſtracted ſubtil Reaſonings would have done. For it proceeded upon Facts of the moſt extraordinary nature, obvious and convincing, even to the meaneſt Capacities; and from whence the Inference was eaſy and natural, that *Jeſus* and the Apoſtles

Apoſtles were ſent from God, and that God bare witneſs to their Doctrine. But then it muſt be conſidered, that tho' the Goſpel continued to make a wonderful Progreſs throughout the World by the force of the Evidence with which it was accompanied, yet it was principally at firſt, and in *Jeruſalem*, that we read of ſuch numbers converted in ſo ſhort a time to the Chriſtian Faith. For there were many Circumſtances there concurring to it, which did not meet to ſuch advantage in other places. It had been the Scene of Chriſt's Miracles, Sufferings, Reſurrection, and the extraordinary Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt; and there were many there that had been Witneſſes to what Chriſt had ſaid and done, and who had been in his Life-time well-diſpoſed to believe in him, tho' afterwards ſcandalized by his Sufferings; and therefore were the more eaſily wrought upon by the manifeſt Demonſtrations of his Divine Power and Glory after his Aſcenſion. And certainly the Evidence muſt have been very ſtrong, which could engage ſuch numbers in *Jeruſalem* itſelf to acknowledge him for the Meſſiah, who had been but a little before ſo ignominiouſly crucified there, after having been condemned as an Impoſtor by the chief Men of their Nation, and by their great Sanhedrim, for whoſe Deciſions they had all had the profoundeſt Veneration.

I have now conſidered the account this Gentleman is pleas'd to give us of the *Proceedings* of

of our bleſſed Lord and his Apoſtles in *planting the Goſpel,* and from which he pretends to prove, that there was *no Appeal to the Underſtanding ever made or intended*; and that they commanded Men to believe at once, without offering any Reaſon or Evidence to ingage them to believe. He himſelf is ſenſible, that there is one obvious Objection lies againſt his Account, and that is, that the Miracles wrought by Chriſt and his Apoſtles were deſigned as Evidence to ingage Men to believe; and to take away the force of this he endeavours to ſhew,

That it was not the Meaning or Intention of Chriſt himſelf to prove his own divine Miſſion by his Miracles; and that they were in themſelves no way fitted to be ſuch Proofs and Evidences.

As to the firſt of theſe, it is certainly a very extraordinary Attempt to undertake to ſhew from the Goſpel-Hiſtory, that Chriſt had no Intention to prove his divine Miſſion by his Miracles, when he himſelf in the moſt expreſs terms imaginable declares, that this was one principal Intention of them, and refers both the Jews and his own Diſciples to thoſe Miracles, as the ſtrongeſt Atteſtations to the Divinity of his Miſſion, ſufficient to convince them that he came from God, and to render them inexcuſable if they did not believe in him; concerning which ſee above, *p.* 7.

Part of what our Author here urges, is what he had ſaid before, and which has been already conſidered,

conſidered, concerning our Saviour's reproving the Phariſees for aſking a Sign, and concerning his previouſly requiring Faith from thoſe upon whom he wrought his Miracles.

Other things that he offers here are ſo weak, that it would be honouring them too far to enter into a laborious Confutation of them. Thus he argues, that our Saviour did not intend his Miracles as Proofs of his divine Miſſion, becauſe he did not gratify *Herod* in working a Miracle before him at the time of his Paſſion; as if a Man of *Herod*'s Character were diſpoſed in thoſe Circumſtances to become his Diſciple, though not long before, upon being aſſured of the Miracles Chriſt wrought in *Galilee*, he deſigned to have murdered him *. He argues the ſame thing from our Saviour's refuſing to ſuffer the evil Spirits whom he ejected to bear witneſs to him as the Chriſt; and if he had readily accepted their Teſtimony, his Adverſaries would probably have improved it to give countenance to that blaſphemous Calumny they had raiſed againſt him, that he was in confederacy with thoſe evil Spirits.

It would be ſomething more to his purpoſe, if it were true, that Chriſt *was remarkably upon the Reſerve, whenever he happened to be among unbelieving Company, and that he was particularly ſparing of thoſe ſuppoſed Arguments*, viz. his Miracles, *amongſt the very Perſons who ſeemed moſt to want them.* I know no inſtance

* See Luke xi. 7. xiii. 31, 32.

in the Goſpel-Hiſtory that gives the leaſt Countenance to this Surmize, but our Saviour's Conduct towards the Men of *Nazareth*, which has been already accounted for. But if he would inſinuate, that our Lord never wrought his Miracles before Unbelievers, nothing can be more falſe. It may be ſaid of his Miracles in general, that they were wrought in the ſight of Perſons who at firſt did not believe in him, but many of whom were brought to believe by thoſe Miracles *. The Scribes and Phariſees were his bittereſt Enemies, and theſe were often preſent when he performed his mighty Works, nor did he decline working his Miracles before them, even when he knew they had a Deſign to obſerve and intrap him. Inſtances of which ſee *Matt.* xii. 10, 14. *Mark* xi. 5—12. ix. 14—27. We are expreſsly told, ſpeaking of the unbelieving Jews, that Jeſus *did many Miracles* before them; *John* xii. 37. And he himſelf frequently in his Diſcourſes with his Enemies appeals to his wonderful Works, as things which they all knew and could not poſſibly deny, and inſiſts upon them as uncontеſted Proofs of his divine Miſſion.

Our Author further argues from Chriſt's enjoining thoſe on whom he wrought his Miracles not to divulge them. *See thou tell no Man* (ſays he) *was generally the Charge.* But this alſo is very unfairly repreſented. With regard to the far greater part of his Miracles, no ſuch Injunction

* See particularly John ii. 18, 23, 24. iii. 2.

tion was given. It was only on ſome particular Occaſions, for which no doubt there were ſpecial Reaſons. It is eaſy to enumerate all the Inſtances of this kind recorded in the Evangeliſts. Such was the Caſe of the Leper mentioned *Matt.* viii. 2, 4. The two blind Men that addreſs'd to him as *the Son of David*, i. e. the Meſſiah, *Matt.* ix. 27—30. The dumb and deaf Man, *Mark* vii. 36. And the Caſe of *Jairus*'s Daughter, who was raiſed from the dead. In theſe Caſes all the Evangeliſts that relate the Miracles obſerve, that Chriſt forbad the Perſons to divulge them. And there is another Inſtance of this kind, *Matt.* xii. 16. where, after Chriſt had reſtored the Man that had the withered Hand in the ſight of the Phariſees, we are told, he *withdrew himſelf from thence*, and *healed thoſe* that came to him, and *charged them that they ſhould not make him known.* With regard to the Caſe laſt mentioned, the Reaſon of the Injunction is plain; it was becauſe the Phariſees were at that time *taking counſel with the Herodians* how they might *deſtroy him*, as appears from Ver. 14. As to the Caſe of the Leper whom he had cleanſed, it is to be obſerved, that the divulging of the Miracle brought ſuch Multitudes together, that *Jeſus could no more openly enter into the City, but was without in deſart Places* for a while. And it was probably becauſe our Saviour foreſaw this Inconvenience, that he forbad him to publiſh it abroad. To which it may be added, that as the People

had on ſome Occaſions ſhewn a forwardneſs to make him a King, he ſometimes found it neceſſary to withdraw, that he might give no occaſion to Tumult or Sedition; and when he knew any particular Miracle he wrought was likely to have that Effect, he forbad it to be divulged. And this alſo probably might be one Reaſon why he charged his Diſciples not to make known his Transfiguration, and ſometimes forbad them to publiſh that he was the Chriſt, the full Notification of which was reſerved till after his Sufferings and Reſurrection, when there was no longer any Danger of it's producing that Effect. But though we could not at this Diſtance aſſign the preciſe Reaſons why our Lord at ſome particular times enjoined them not to divulge what he had done; yet this we are ſure of, that the Reaſon could not be that he did not intend his Miracles as Proofs of his divine Miſſion, ſince he frequently in the moſt ſolemn manner appealed to them as Proofs.

But what this Writer ſeems to lay a particular Streſs upon, is that which our Saviour ſaid, when applied to for his extraordinary Aſſiſtance in favour of the Nobleman's Child, *Unleſs you ſee Signs and Wonders, you will not believe.* But what is this deſigned to prove? Is it to prove, that Chriſt in working his Miracles had no Intention that his Miracles ſhould be regarded as Proofs of his divine Miſſion? This indeed is what this Gentleman produces it for; but the

contrary

contrary rather follows from it. For if he knew the Jews would not believe without Miracles, and if it was his Deſire and Deſign that they ſhould believe in him, which will ſcarce be denied, this made it neceſſary for him to work Miracles before them with this very View, that they might be thereby brought to believe in him. But it will be ſaid, that our Saviour here reproves the Jews for not believing in him without Miracles. But neither could this be his Intention; ſince he himſelf declares, that if he had not done *Works among them which no other Man did, they had not had Sin.* But what he deſigns here to reprove is the Temper of thoſe, who though they had ſufficient Evidence of his Miracles from Teſtimony that might be ſafely depended on, yet would not believe in him, except they themſelves ſaw them with their own Eyes. This ſeems to have been the Caſe of this Nobleman. We are told *John* iv. 45. that the *Galileans* who had been at the Feaſt at *Jeruſalem* and had *ſeen* the Miracles Chriſt had done there, *received* him upon his Return into *Galilee*. This Nobleman had not been there, but had been informed of all this; and when he heard that *Jeſus was come into Galilee, he went and beſought him that he would come down and heal his Son.* He was in hope that Chriſt might heal his Son, if he *came down* and touched him, but not otherwiſe. His Faith ſeems to have been very imperfect, probably becauſe he himſelf

himſelf had not ſeen any of the mighty Works Chriſt had wrought, though he had ſufficient Reaſon to be aſſured of the Truth of them. Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, *Except ye ſee Signs and Wonders, ye will not believe.* And he did not go down to his Houſe, as he deſired, to heal his Son, but ſaid, *Go thy way, thy Son liveth.* The Nobleman ſeems to have been ſenſible of the Reproof, and *he believed the Word that Jeſus had ſpoken, and went his way.* And upon finding that his Son began to recover *the very Hour that Jeſus ſaid unto him, thy Son liveth, he himſelf believed, with his whole Houſe.* He then fully believed Chriſt's divine Miſſion, of which he had doubted before.

As this Gentleman does what he can to make it appear, that Chriſt himſelf never intended his Miracles as Proofs of his divine Miſſion, ſo he endeavours to ſhew, that in themſelves they are no way fitted to be ſuch Proofs or Evidences.

And firſt, he thinks he may "not unplauſibly "ſuggeſt, what has been ſo often urged upon "this occaſion, that Miracles have, time out of "mind, been undoubtedly performed, as well "in favour of falſe Doctrines, and therefore they "can never be ſingly, and of themſelves alone, "any certain Marks of a true, *p.* 46." He ſpeaks of it here as paſt all doubt, that Miracles have been done in favour of falſe Doctrines, tho' very probably he believes nothing of the matter. For he ſcruples not to call the Popiſh Miracles, which he afterwards mentions, *falſe and*

and fictitious, tho' theſe are as much to be depended on as other Miracles pretended to be wrought in favour of falſe Doctrines. But if he would offer any thing to the purpoſe, in order to run a Parallel between the Atteſtations pretended to be given to any falſe Doctrines, and thoſe given to the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, let him ſhew,

1. That the Miracles wrought or pretended to be wrought in favour of falſe Doctrines, or of Impoſtors, were Works plainly above all the Power or Art of Man to perform. For many wonderful things may be done by human Art or Skill, and a dextrous Application of natural Cauſes, which cannot properly be called Miracles.

2. That theſe things were done, not in a ſingle Inſtance, or in a very few Inſtances, in which caſe there might be ſome Suſpicion of Management; but that there was a Succeſſion of them in many Inſtances, and for a Courſe of Years together.

3. That theſe Miracles were wrought in profeſſed Atteſtation to the Divine Miſſion of the Perſons by whom, or in favour of whom they were wrought, and to the Truth of the Doctrines they delivered. For ſtrange things have happened from time to time in all Ages and Countries, from which no Conſequence can be drawn, as not being wrought in declared Atteſtation to any Doctrines, or to the Divine Miſſion of any Perſons.

4. That they were wrought not in ſecret or before a few only, but in an open publick manner; wrought not merely in favour of the reigning Religion, when a very nice Examination would not be very ſafe; but in favour of a Religion contrary to the moſt inveterate Prejudices, and in the view of ſubtil and malicious Enemies, who had the Power in their hands, and who had all the Opportunities that could be deſired to have detected the Impoſture, if there had been any; and were ſtrongly carried by their Inclinations and Intereſts to do it. And yet were not able upon the moſt diligent Examination to detect Fraud or Impoſture in any one Inſtance, in which caſe it might have induced a Suſpicion of the reſt, that they were all owing to the ſame Cauſes.

5. That the Accounts of theſe Miracles were delivered by Perſons, who themſelves ſaw and knew him, and who by their whole Conduct gave all the Marks of diſintereſted Probity and Sincerity, and perſiſted in their Teſtimony with an unſhaken Conſtancy, without ever falſifying in any one Inſtance, tho' they thereby expoſed themſelves to the moſt grievous Perſecutions and Sufferings.

6. That even ſome of the moſt obſtinate Adverſaries that lived neareſt thoſe Times did not pretend abſolutely to deny the Facts, tho' they endeavoured to attribute them to wrong Cauſes; and that great Numbers of Perſons ſtrongly prejudiced againſt the Religion thus atteſted,

atteſted, embraced it upon the Credit of thoſe miraculous Atteſtations, in oppoſition to their former Prejudices, and to their worldly Intereſts, as well as to their favourite Appetites and Paſſions; and this in the very Age in which the Facts were done, and in Places where they had the beſt Opportunities of enquiring into the Truth of thoſe Facts, and detecting them if they had been falſe *.

* The *Jewiſh* Story concerning *Jeſus*'s performing his wonderful Works by virtue of the ineffable Name which he ſtole out of the Temple and hid in his Thigh, is well known. And many both of the *Jews* and *Heathens* aſcribed his Miracles to his extraordinary Skill in Magick: And among others, *Celſus*, as appears in ſeveral Paſſages of *Origen*'s Work againſt him. All that can be truly gathered from hence is, That the Truth of the miraculous Facts was ſo evident, that they were not able to deny it. For as to the Charge itſelf, it is manifeſtly abſurd and ridiculous, whether we conſider the Nature and Circumſtances of the Works themſelves, or the End for which they were wrought, or the Character of *Jeſus*, and the Nature and Deſign of the Religion he publiſhed to the World.——PLINY obſerves, that never was any Man fonder of *Magick* than NERO, or did more to encourage and countenance it, and that he ſent for the ableſt Maſters of it from all Parts, and yet that never was the Vanity and Falſhood of it more plainly diſcovered than in his Time. *Plin. Hiſt. Nat. Lib.* 30. *Cap.* 2.—— And if the *Favour* and *Encouragement* given to it by a mighty *Emperor* could not hinder the Fallacy of it from being detected; can it be imagin'd, that if the Things done by our *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles*, who had no Authority to countenance them, and ſo many watchful Enemies to obſerve them, had been of no higher kind than *Magical* Operations, the Folly and Impoſture would not have been ſoon detected and expoſed?

If this Writer will pleaſe to produce any falſe Religion that had ſuch Teſtimonials, and to whom all this may be applied, it ſhall be conſidered. In the mean time I affirm, that it is abſolutely out of his power; and that therefore this Part of the Evidence for Chriſtianity ſtands upon a firm and immoveable Baſis; ſince it may be clearly ſhewn, that all the above-mentioned Circumſtances concur in it, in which it can never be equal'd by any falſe Religion. And tho' the Scripture warns us (as he obſerves) of *lying Wonders and falſe Chriſts, and to take the utmoſt care of what we give credit to of this kind*; yet it certainly never ſuppoſes, that any falſe Chriſts ſhould ariſe, who ſhould be able to work ſuch a Succeſſion of glorious Miracles, as were wrought in atteſtation of Chriſtianity.

The wonderful Works wrought by our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt* in avowed Confirmation of his divine Miſſion were of ſuch a nature, and ſo manifeſtly tranſcending all the Art and Power of Man, ſuch as the reſtoring periſhed Limbs in a Moment, healing the moſt deſperate Diſeaſes by a Word, commanding the Winds and the Seas, and even raiſing the Dead; that they might be alone ſufficient, as they were circumſtanced, to give a convincing Proof of his divine Miſſion: but they received a wonderful Confirmation by his Reſurrection from the Dead, which he himſelf had foretold, and to which he appealed, and of which there was all the Evidence that could

be reaſonably deſired *. And this was followed and farther confirmed by his Aſcenſion into Heaven in the view of his gazing Diſciples; and both were placed beyond all reaſonable doubt, and received a mighty additional Force, by the extraordinary Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt ſoon after

* Our Author gives a hint, that if our Saviour had but *taken one Turn in the Market-place* after his Reſurrection, this would have been a more effectual Conviction to the *Jews* than all the Evidence that was offered, and *might have ſpared both the painful Lives and Labours of ſo many holy Vouchers, who periſhed merely by the thing's being done in a Corner*, p. 67. But certainly the Proof already given of *Chriſt*'s Reſurrection was a much ſtronger Evidence of it, than merely his taking a Turn or two thro' the Market-Place would have been, before a Croud of People, few of whom could be ſuppoſed to be ſo intimately acquainted with him as to be abſolutely ſure that it was he: or if they had believed that it was like him, they would have been ready to think, as the Diſciples at firſt did, that they *had ſeen a Spirit*, or ſome unaccountable Appearance in his Form and Shape. Whereas, as the Caſe is now circumſtanced, he *ſhewed himſelf alive* after his Reſurrection *by many infallible Proofs*, to Perſons to whom he was perfectly known, and who could not be impoſed upon in this matter. They themſelves were not forward to believe it, till they could no longer doubt of it without renouncing the Teſtimony of all their Senſes. They ſaw him, they handled him, they eat and drank with him, they converſed familiarly with him on many important Subjects for forty Days together. If it had only been the eleven Apoſtles that teſtified this, the Number of the Witneſſes would have been very ſufficient; but there were many others that ſaw him, and converſed with him. And at laſt he *was ſeen*, as St. *Paul* in his firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians* affirms, by *above five hundred at once*, moſt of whom *were alive* when he writ that Epiſtle. It can-

after his Aſcenſion, in conſequence of his own Prediction and Promiſe. And this again was proved to the World by the moſt extraordinary Gifts and Powers abiding with his Diſciples, who went thro' all Nations teaching the things which he had commanded them, and were enabled

not without the greateſt Abſurdity be ſuppoſed, that there ſhould have been a Combination among ſo many Perſons to put an Impoſture upon the World in that matter; or if there had, it is ſcarce poſſible but that it muſt have been detected, and that among ſuch a Number one or other would have been prevail'd upon by Bribes or Threatnings, to diſcover and acknowledge the Impoſture. Whereas they all perſiſted uniformly in their Teſtimony with an unſhaken Conſtancy, and many of them ſealed it with their Blood. But that which gave the moſt remarkable Confirmation to their Teſtimony, and which was never equal'd in any other Caſe, was, that God bore them witneſs by Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, poured forth upon the Diſciples in the Name of a riſen *Jeſus*.

The Story ſtarted by the *Jews*, that his Diſciples ſtole him by Night whilſt the Soldiers ſlept, was a plain Acknowledgment that his Body was gone out of the Sepulchre; and ſince it was pretended the Soldiers were aſleep, he might have riſen of himſelf for any thing they could tell to the contrary. But if they had really believed that the Diſciples ſtole him, whilſt a Guard of Soldiers were purpoſely ſet to watch the Body; can it be imagined that they would not have made a ſtrict Enquiry, and have got the Soldiers ſeverely puniſhed for ſo criminal a Neglect of their Duty, which could ſcarce be ſuppoſed without a Combination between them and the Diſciples? Why did they not take pains to ſearch out and ſeize the Diſciples, to confront them with one another, and with the Guards? Why did they not call *Joſeph* of *Arimathea* to an account, to get, if poſſible, to the bottom of the Impoſture, and to ſtifle all Reports of his

enabled for many Years together in the Name and by the Power of a riſen *Jeſus*, to perform the moſt illuſtrious Miracles, ſuch as he himſelf had done whilſt on Earth; all which came in aid

his Reſurrection in the very birth? This is the Method that common Senſe would have directed to in this caſe; and which they would undoubtedly have taken, conſidering how zealous they were in the Cauſe, and that they had the power in their hands. But inſtead of this, all was huddled up; the Centinels were unpuniſhed, their Evidence ſtifled, no farther Enquiry made. And when the Diſciples openly avowed that *Chriſt* was riſen from the Dead, of which they were Witneſſes, they durſt not enter into a particular Diſcuſſion or Examination of that matter, but contented themſelves with commanding them not to ſpeak in his Name, who boldly declared to their faces, that they would do it. In a word, it is plain from their whole Management on this occaſion, that it was not for want of ſufficient Evidence of *Chriſt*'s Reſurrection, that the Rulers of the *Jews* did not believe in him; and that as they were diſpoſed, they would not have acknowledged him as the Meſſiah, whatever other Evidence had been offered; ſo when they could not deny that *Jeſus* had raiſed *Lazarus* from the Dead, inſtead of being convinced by it, they only took counſel how they might deſtroy them both.

But if the Rulers and Body of the *Jewiſh* Nation had believed in a riſen *Jeſus*, and embraced his Religion, would thoſe, who now make their not believing an Argument againſt the Truth of *Chriſt*'s Reſurrection, have been convinced? No. It is probable they would have taken ſtill greater advantage of this, and repreſented it as a national Affair, in which the *Jews* joined out of that Attachment to the Honour and Intereſt of their Nation, for which they were ſo remarkable. Such is the true Spirit of Infidelity, always to find fault with the Evidence that is already offered, and to inſiſt upon ſome other or farther Proof, which if it were granted would be as far from giving ſatisfaction as before.

aid of their Teſtimony, and gave it a force which no other Teſtimony ever had. Here is ſuch a Concurrence of the moſt extraordinary divine Atteſtations, ſuch a Concatenation of Evidences, one ſupporting another, that the Apoſtle had reaſon to ſay to the Chriſtian Converts, that if *an Angel from Heaven* had endeavoured to turn them to *another Goſpel*, they were not to regard him. Where he does not put a Caſe that he ſuppoſed might really happen, but uſes a ſtrong Manner of Expreſſion to ſignify, that no Pretence whatſoever ſhould turn them from a ſteady Adherence to the Goſpel of *Chriſt*. And tho' our Author ſeems to think that an Angel's appearing from Heaven would have been the higheſt Evidence poſſible, *p.* 11. yet I believe any one that impartially conſiders this matter, will be apt to conclude, that the Appearance of a ſingle Angel would have fallen vaſtly ſhort in Strength of Evidence, of that amazing Succeſſion of illuſtrious divine Atteſtations that were given to Chriſtianity; the like to which never was in proof of any falſe Religion, nor can be ſuppoſed to be in conſiſtency with the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of divine Providence. For this would be to lay too great a Temptation in the way of his frail Creatures; ſince we cannot conceive, that ſuppoſing a Revelation really to have come from God, it could have been attended with more illuſtrious confirming Evidences of a divine Original, than all theſe taken together do form. And when to theſe external Atteſtations

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is added the exemplary Purity of the great Founder of this Religion, the excellent Character of his Diſciples, ſo remote from that of Impoſtors, and from all worldly Views and carnal Intereſts; and the Nature and Tendency of the Religion thus atteſted, which is deſigned to reclaim Men from Idolatry, Vice, and Wickedneſs, to the Love of God, to his pure Worſhip, to the Practice of univerſal Holineſs and Virtue, and to the heavenly Mind and Life, it carries the Evidence as far as it can go. For this again furniſhes a new Proof, that as the Miracles were ſuch as vaſtly exceeded all human Power, ſo were they not owing to the Agency of ſuperior evil Beings; ſince it can never be imagined, that they would contribute their Aſſiſtance to the performing ſuch wonderful Things in favour of a Religion ſo directly oppoſite to all their Intereſts, and to the Deſigns evil Beings muſt be ſuppoſed to have in view. And therefore they muſt have been wrought by the immediate Aſſiſtance and Agency of God himſelf, or, which comes to the ſame thing, by the Aſſiſtance of good Beings ſuperior to Man, acting under him, and by his Direction, and who would never have thus given their Atteſtation to Fraud and Impoſture.

There is another thing which the Author offers, *p.* 47. and which he ſeems to deſign as an Argument. I would anſwer it if I underſtood it, but I confeſs I cannot well make ſenſe of it myſelf, nor have met with any body that could.

could. But as far as I am able to apprehend it, the Drift of it ſeems to be this; that ſuch Miracles as were wrought at the firſt Eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity were to be expected as the natural Effects of ſuch a benevolent Religion as the Chriſtian, and therefore could not be Evidences of its Truth and Divinity: As if the ſame wonderful Works might not be both Inſtances of great Benevolence, and the Effects of a divine Power, and conſequently Proofs of a divine Interpoſition. And certainly if any Religion could be ſuppoſed to be of ſuch a nature, as neceſſarily to bring along with it ſuch glorious Effects of a divine Power and Benevolence, this would be a plain Evidence that it came from God.

This Gentleman having made an Attempt to ſhew that Miracles can in no caſe be any Proofs at all, afterwards ſeems willing in his great Liberality to grant, that Miracles might be Evidences to thoſe that actually ſaw them; but he denies they could be Evidences to any other Perſons. He affirms, that they could not be Proofs *even to the Men of that Generation that were not actually and perſonally preſent, when they were done, and that for the ſame evident Reaſon they can be none to us now*: p. 51. He goes on to declaim in many Words after his manner, and all that he urges here depends upon this Principle, that no Accounts of paſt Facts can at all be ſafely depended upon, and that no Man is to believe any thing but what he actually ſees with

with his own Eyes; That *the Teſtimony of Sight is by its Nature an Evidence not to be communicated.*——And *that the Light of Conviction which is thus received can extend no farther than to the Eye-witneſs himſelf, loſt and extinguiſhed the firſt Moment it is offered to be imparted*; p. 52, 53. A way of talking completely ridiculous, and theſe Gentlemen themſelves would eſteem it ſo, if applied to any other Subject. And the Reaſon he gives for it is no leſs ridiculous; that *all the Aſſurance in the World of another's ſeeing can never have an equal Effect upon my Senſes, or make me ſee a Thing where I was not actually preſent.* But tho' no Aſſurance of another Man's ſeeing a thing can make me ſee it, and who ever was ſo abſurd as to pretend it could have that Effect? yet it may lay a juſt Foundation for my believing it, and in ſome Caſes the Aſſurance may be ſo ſtrong, that I can no more reaſonably doubt of it than if I had ſeen it my ſelf.

In oppoſition to all this looſe Harangue, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that if the Miracles originally wrought in Atteſtation of Chriſtianity were Proofs to thoſe that actually ſaw them, then they are Proofs to us too, provided we have Evidence reaſonably ſufficient to convince us, that theſe extraordinary Facts were really done. So that ſtill the Queſtion returns to this, whether we have ſufficient reaſon to think, that the Accounts given us of thoſe Facts are to be depended upon, and that thoſe Facts were really per-

formed. For if ſo, they are as truly Evidences to us of the Truth and Divinity of that Revelation, in Atteſtation of which they were wrought, as they were to thoſe that ſaw them, or lived in the Age in which they were performed. If it be ſaid, none that live in ſucceeding Ages can have the ſame Evidence that thoſe of the firſt had; I anſwer, they cannot have ocular Evidence, and ſo it muſt be ſaid of all paſt Facts, or all Facts done at a diſtance from us; but yet they may have Evidence ſufficient to convince any conſidering Perſon that they were done; and an Evidence ſo ſtrongly circumſtanced, that no Man can reaſonably deny it, without going upon the above-mentioned Principle, that he cannot ſafely believe any paſt Facts at all, or any thing but what he ſees with his own Eyes. And the Man that is obliged to take refuge here, is driven to as great an Abſurdity as can well be ſuppoſed; and plainly ſhews, that he has nothing reaſonable to ſay againſt the Credit of thoſe Facts. And yet this is the Shift this Writer is plainly reduced to. And this ſeems to be the Principle on which his Infidelity reſts; a manifeſt Proof that it is *not founded* on Reaſon or Argument.

It is on this Principle that he tells us, *p.* 52. That " that Divine Demonſtration to By-
" ſtanders, the Voice of God himſelf, *This is*
" *my beloved Son*, has been by one intervening
" Age dwindled long ſince to human Tradi-
" tion. God no longer bears witneſs to his
" Son,

" Son, but Men only bear witneſs to God." This may paſs for a pretty Jingle. The Antitheſis ſounds well enough, between *Men's bearing witneſs*, and *God's bearing witneſs*; but the Reaſoning is poor, and the Sentiment falſe. For if the wonderful Glory of Chriſt at his Transfiguration, and the Voice that then came to him was to be regarded as the Teſtimony of God to his Son in that Age, it is to be regarded as ſuch ſtill, provided we have ſufficient Evidence of the Reality of the Fact; and tho' we ourſelves did not ſee the Glory, nor hear the Voice, yet if we have good reaſon to believe that the Account of thoſe, who themſelves ſaw and heard it, is to be depended on, it ought in all reaſon to have an Influence upon us as really as if we had been preſent ourſelves. For the manner in which we come to know a thing does not alter the caſe; it is ſufficient, if we know it in ſuch a way as to have a reaſonable Conviction that it is true. And it is certain that in many caſes we can no more reaſonably doubt of things which we have by Information from others who ſaw and heard them, than if we ſaw and heard them ourſelves. And particularly it may be ſhewn, and often has been ſhewn with great Strength and Clearneſs, that there never was a Teſtimony more to be depended on than that of the Apoſtles, and firſt Witneſſes of Chriſtianity.

I need not take much notice of what he urges, *p.* 52. and which he backs with the Authority of the *Romiſh* Church, that if Miracles

were *neceſſary* at firſt in *the Infancy of the Goſpel, they are ſo ſtill,* and ought to be continued in the Church. For ſuppoſing the Authority of a divine Revelation ſufficiently confirmed by a Series of the moſt extraordinary divine Atteſtations at its firſt Eſtabliſhment, it would be an idle thing to expect that there ſhould be new Atteſtations and Miracles in every Age. It is ſufficient, that the Accounts of thoſe firſt original Atteſtations are tranſmitted to us in a manner that may be ſafely depended upon. To demand new Signs and Wonders to be continually done before our Eyes, would be perfectly unreaſonable. As juſtly might it be demanded, that all the extraordinary Facts that were done in the firſt Age, in Atteſtation of the Goſpel, ſhould be done over again in every Age. And as one Man, in one Age, and in one Country, hath as much right to expect and demand it as another, all theſe things muſt be repeated in the View, and for the Satisfaction of every ſingle Perſon in every Age, and in every Country. And what a ſtrange Scene of things this would introduce, how unfit and unbecoming the divine Wiſdom, is very evident! At that rate, nothing were to be ſeen but Signs and Wonders; and, by being ſo common, they would ceaſe to be extraordinary, and this very thing would hinder the Effect.

Our Author having endeavoured to ſhew, that our Saviour never appealed to the Underſtandings of Men, or laid before them any Evidence

dence to convince them of his Divine Miſſion; that his Miracles were no Proofs of this at all, nor were ever intended by him as ſuch; and that the Accounts of them that are tranſmitted to us are not to be depended upon; that is, having endeavoured to remove every thing that could be ſuppoſed to lay a rational Foundation for believing, proceeds, *p.* 56, *&c.* to ſhew what it is that is deſigned in the Goſpel as the true Principle of our Faith; and this he reſolves entirely into the immediate *Revelation* of the Holy Ghoſt *imparted ſeparately and ſupernaturally to every Individual*, as he expreſſes it, *p.* 112. which *irradiates the Souls* of Believers at once, with *an irreſiſtible Light from Heaven, that flaſhes Conviction in a Moment*; and *thus our Faith is compleated in an inſtant, and the moſt perfect and finiſhed Creed produced at once, without any tedious Progreſs in Deductions of our own*; p. 59. This he repreſents as of ſuch a nature, as to render all outward Inſtructions entirely needleſs; ſo that we muſt not be left *to take any the leaſt Part of our Inſtructions from one another.* Nor need we have recourſe to the holy Scriptures, which he calls *Manuſcript Authorities and Paper Revelations*, or *concern our* ſelves at all about the *Credit of ancient Miracles*, or other Facts there recorded *. The Spirit alone is to do all without our own Reaſon, or the

* See the ſeveral Paſſages relating to this laid together in my former Letter, *p.* 11, *&c.* which therefore I need not particularly repeat here.

the Uſe of any Means on our parts. He aſſerts, that this Influence of the Spirit is promiſed to abide with all Chriſtians to the end of the World, to guide them infallibly in all Truth, ſo that they ſhould not be *left liable one Moment to a Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition.* That it is univerſal; it *is the Light which enlightneth every Man that cometh into the World:* That it cauſes Men to *think all alike*; and that on this Scheme alone, Men may be juſtly puniſhed for Hereſy and for Unbelief; ſince this muſt be owing to *a rebellious Oppoſition of the Influence of the Spirit,* and a *wilful* rejecting *his Sollicitations,* and a *Refuſal of his offered Grace.*

But I do not ſee how our Author can conſiſtently talk of Perſons reſiſting the Spirit, or what room there is left upon his Scheme for Unbelief, or for Hereſies at all. For ſince he ſuppoſes this Influence to be an *irreſiſtible Light,* inſtantaneous in its Effects, *infallible* in its Guidance, and the Effect of it to be the completing Faith at once, and infuſing the *whole Creed* in an inſtant, engaging Men to *think all alike,* and freeing them from all *Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition*; and ſince he at the ſame time ſuppoſes this Influence of the Spirit and infallible Inſpiration to be univerſal, imparted to every Individual, and extending to every Man that cometh into the World; it manifeſtly follows, that every Chriſtian, yea, every Man that cometh into the World, is irreſiſtibly enlightned, has his Faith abſolutely completed, is free from all

all Poſſibility of Error, and thinks exactly in all Points of Faith the ſame way with every other Man; and that therefore there can be no Unbelief, no Error, no Hereſy, no Difference of Sentiment among Men or Chriſtians.

Nothing can be more contrary to plain and undeniable Fact, more contradictory in all its Parts, and more evidently ſubverſive of itſelf, than the Scheme here advanced by this Writer. I am ſenſible this Gentleman will be ready to ſneer at the Charge. For undoubtedly he does not intend that the World ſhould look upon it as a thing which he himſelf believes. It is the *true ſcriptural and revealed Account of the Matter*, and the Scripture alone muſt anſwer for it. And therefore the more Contradictions are proved upon his Scheme, the better it will anſwer his Deſign, which is to expoſe Chriſtianity to the Deriſion and Contempt of Mankind.

But if it be made appear, that this is all groſs Miſrepreſentation; that the Account he is pleaſed to give us is as contrary to Scripture, as it is to Reaſon and Common Senſe, then the Contradictions and Abſurdities are to be charged upon the Author himſelf, and he is juſtly accountable for them. And this Attempt of his muſt only paſs for a Proof of his readineſs to take any Methods, how unfair or diſingenuous ſoever, to expoſe the Religion of *Jeſus*.

In order to anſwer his Deſign, he heaps together a number of Texts, without any regard to their particular Meaning and Intention, as they lie

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in the ſacred Writings, and applies them all promiſcuouſly the ſame way. He every where confounds the extraordinary and ordinary Influence of the Holy Spirit; that which was peculiar to the Apoſtles, or to the firſt Age, he applies to Chriſtians in every Age; and if any thing extraordinary was done in ſome particular Caſes, he urges it as if it was deſigned to be the ſtanding Rule in every Caſe. Thus, to ſhew that the Holy Ghoſt *operates without delay, by an irreſiſtible Light from Heaven, that flaſhes Conviction in a moment*; he inſtances in the *happy Metamorphoſis of an officious Perſecutor into as zealous an Apoſtle*; p. 58, 59. But tho' the Converſion of St. *Paul*, taken in all its Circumſtances, was a ſignal Atteſtation to the Truth of Chriſtianity, it would be very abſurd to pretend to draw an Argument from ſuch an extraordinary Inſtance, to ſhew what are the ordinary Methods of God's dealings with Men in bringing them to the Faith of Chriſt. That Apoſtle declares concerning himſelf, that he *did not receive the Goſpel*, which he preached, *of Man, neither was he taught it, but by the Revelation of* Jeſus Chriſt, *Gal.* i. 12. But can it be concluded from thence, that every Chriſtian receives the Goſpel in the ſame immediate way from Chriſt himſelf, without any human Inſtruction? As well might it be ſaid, that when he declares concerning himſelf, that he was *an Apoſtle, not of Man, nor by Man*, his Intention was to ſignify, that all others were Apoſtles

Apoſtles as well as he. Yet this is the Courſe of our Author's reaſoning, than which nothing can be more abſurd and ridiculous. And even with regard to this Caſe of the Converſion of St. *Paul*, his Faith in Chriſt though ſuddenly wrought was not unreaſonable, or without Evidence. His Underſtanding and Reaſon was fully convinced by what he heard and ſaw of the divine Power and Glory of a riſen Jeſus. And the Influence of the Holy Spirit upon his Mind, enduing him with extraordinary Gifts and Powers, was not a blind Impulſe to engage him to believe he knew not why (which is the Repreſentation this Gentleman is pleas'd to make of the Influence of the Spirit) but enabling him clearly to diſcern the Goſpel-evidence, and giving him a right Knowledge of the Chriſtian Religion, the whole Scheme of its Doctrines and Laws, its Proofs and Evidences, ſo that his Faith was in the ſtricteſt Senſe rational.

It is readily granted, that there was an extraordinary Influence of the Holy Ghoſt upon the Apoſtles, who were choſen to be the firſt authorized Witneſſes of Chriſtianity, and had an immediate Commiſſion from Chriſt himſelf to publiſh his Religion to the World; I ſay, there was an extraordinary Influence of the Holy Ghoſt upon them, both for enabling them to perform the moſt illuſtrious Miracles, and for enduing them with ſpiritual Gifts, and infallibly guiding them in the Doctrines and Laws they were to deliver to the Church in the Name

of Chriſt. And there is nothing in this but what is highly reaſonable. For ſuppoſing God to give an extraordinary Revelation of his Will for the Inſtruction and Direction of Mankind, it was very proper that thoſe to whom he originally gave that Revelation to be by them publiſhed to the World in his Name, ſhould have their Minds extraordinarily illuminated in the Knowledge of the Doctrines and Laws they were to deliver as from him, ſo as to be kept from Error in delivering them; and that they ſhould alſo be enabled to produce ſufficient Credentials of their divine Miſſion, to convince Mankind that he ſent them. God's doing this in the Caſe of the Chriſtian Revelation has a manifeſt Propriety in it, and is an Inſtance of his great Wiſdom and Goodneſs. And it would be a ſtrange thing to pretend to argue from this that Chriſtianity is not on a rational Foundation, or that the Faith of the Goſpel cannot be an Aſſent founded on rational Conviction; when this very Thing is part of the Evidence on which Chriſtianity is founded, and which makes the Aſſent to it reaſonable. And yet this extraordinary Influence of the Holy Ghoſt, promiſed to and conferred upon the Apoſtles for theſe valuable Purpoſes, is what ſeveral of the Texts mentioned by this Writer refer to. Particularly thoſe Texts which he produces with ſo much Pomp, p. 57. *The Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father and the Son, he ſhall teſtify of me.* And again, *The Spirit whom*

whom I ſhall ſend ſhall lead you into all Truth. The former of theſe Paſſages, *The Spirit of Truth ſhall teſtify of me*, relates particularly to the Teſtimony given to Chriſt by the extraordinary Gifts and Operations of the Holy Spirit in that firſt Age. And accordingly our Lord after thoſe Words immediately adds, ſpeaking to his Apoſtles, *And ye alſo ſhall bear Witneſs, becauſe ye have been with me from the Beginning.* John xv. 26, 27. The other Text relates to the infallible Guidance promiſed to the Apoſtles to aſſiſt them in the executing of their Office. And accordingly, after ſaying, *The Spirit whom I ſhall ſend ſhall lead you into all Truth*, he adds, *and he will ſhew you Things to come.* Ch. xvi. 13. And before this, in the ſame Diſcourſe, he had promiſed, *The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghoſt—ſhall teach you all Things, and bring all Things to your Remembrance, whatſoever I have ſaid unto you.* Theſe Texts which plainly relate to the Apoſtles, and which in that View have nothing in them but what is proper and neceſſary, and highly for the Honour of Chriſtianity, are applied by this Gentleman, as if they contained a Promiſe of an infallible Guidance of the Spirit to all Chriſtians in every Age *; that they might not *be left liable one Moment*

* In like manner he endeavours to draw an Argument for that univerſal Inſpiration of all Chriſtians which he contends for, from the Promiſe made by our Saviour to his Apoſtles, *Matt.* x. 19, 20. where having told them

Moment to a Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition, as he expreſſes it, p. 60. A thing which is evidently abſurd and falſe in Fact. But then this Falſhood and Abſurdity is not chargeable on the Scripture Scheme, or upon the New Teſtament, but on our Author himſelf and his Miſrepreſentation of it.

Beſides

of the Perſecutions to which they ſhould be expoſed, and that they ſhould be *brought before Governours and Kings for his ſake*, he bids them *take no Thought how or what* they ſhould *ſpeak*; that is, not to be anxiouſly ſollicitous about it, which otherwiſe they might be apt to be; for that it ſhould *be given them in that ſame Hour what* they ſhould *ſpeak*; and adds, *For it is not ye that ſpeak, but the Spirit of your Father that ſpeaketh in you.* By which, though our Saviour does not intend to ſignify, that all uſe and exerciſe of their own Reaſon was to be entirely ſuperſeded, as if they were not to have *ſo much as a ſingle Thought or Suggeſtion of their own*, as our Author gloſſes it; yet he certainly deſigns to ſignify that on ſuch Occaſions they ſhould not be left merely to themſelves, and their own Thoughts and Expreſſions, but that the Spirit ſhould aſſiſt them in both in an extraordinary manner: and this was wiſely and graciouſly provided for the Encouragement of the Apoſtles under the amazing Difficulties they were to encounter with in the firſt Promulgation of a Religion that was to meet with ſo much Oppoſition in the World. Yet from this extraordinary Caſe our Author ſeems willing to infer, that the *Spirit dictates Sentiments in ſecret to the Underſtandings* of all Chriſtians in every Age, and *miraculouſly ſpeaks* to them for their *Inſtruction*, and *gives them what to think as well as what to ſay*. p. 108, 109. And with equal Strength and Juſtice he might argue, that all Chriſtians have the Power of working Miracles, of *healing the Sick, cleanſing the Lepers*, and *raiſing the Dead*, becauſe our Saviour in that Chapter commiſſions and empowers his Apoſtles to do ſo, *ver.* 8.

Beſides the extraordinary Influence of the Holy Ghoſt upon the Apoſtles to endue them with miraculous Powers, and to guide them infallibly in delivering the Doctrine of Chriſt; there was alſo a plentiful Effuſion of the Spirit upon the firſt Chriſtians, though not in the ſame degree with the Apoſtles, which contributed mightily to the ſpreading and propagating the Chriſtian Faith. And conſidering that the Chriſtian Religion at its firſt Publication had almoſt inſuperable Obſtacles to encounter with in a World ſunk in Idolatry, Superſtition, and Vice, there was then great need of an extraordinary Meaſure of divine Influences to accompany the preaching of the Goſpel among thoſe to whom it was publiſhed. And its making ſo ſpeedy and wonderful a Progreſs as it did in face of the greateſt Oppoſition, when it had the inveterate Prejudices, the corrupt Appetites and Paſſions of Men engaged againſt it, and no worldly Advantages on its ſide, furniſheth an additional Proof of its divine Original, and ſhewed a ſignal Interpoſition of Heaven in its favour, and a divine Light and Power accompanying it. And if a Revelation that was at firſt propagated in a way that beſpoke an extraordinary divine Power and Preſence, is alſo of ſuch a nature, that it will bear the cooleſt Examination; if its Proofs and Evidences approve themſelves to our impartial Reaſon, and its Doctrines and Laws appear to be worthy of God and of the moſt excellent Tendency, there is every thing that

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can juſtly be deſired to make our Aſſent to it rational and well-founded. And this is the Caſe of the Chriſtian Revelation.

I doubt not, that upon a critical Examination of the Texts produced by this Writer, it would appear that ſeveral of them, beſides thoſe already mentioned, relate to the firſt Chriſtians, and to the extraordinary Effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt in that Age. Of this kind that Text appears to me to be, which he mentions in the firſt place, and on which he ſeems to lay a particular Streſs, *No Man can ſay that Jeſus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghoſt.* It is taken from 1 *Cor.* xii. 3. where St. *Paul* is profeſſedly diſcourſing concerning the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit poured forth in that firſt Age, and the Perſons endued with thoſe Gifts. And after declaring, that *No Man ſpeaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jeſus accurſed,* which relates to thoſe Jewiſh Teachers that went about anathematizing the Name of Jeſus, and at the ſame time made high Pretenſions to the Holy Ghoſt, which they would not allow any Gentiles could be Partakers of; he adds, *No Man can ſay that Jeſus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghoſt,* where he probably refers to thoſe who in that firſt Age preached the Goſpel, and confirmed it by Miracles, and the extraordinary Gifts conferred upon them; which ſhewed ſuch Perſons were Partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, though ſeveral of them had been originally Gentiles, without whoſe divine Aſſiſtance and Influence they could not

not have done this. This ſeems to be the proper Intention of this Paſſage. Though if it were taken in a more general Senſe, to ſignify that the gracious Aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit is neceſſary to our believing and acknowledging Chriſt in a right manner, ſo as heartily to receive and ſubmit to him as our Lord (for no body can ſuppoſe that the bare ſaying in Words, that *Jeſus is the Lord* is all that is intended) there is nothing abſurd in ſuch an Interpretation. I freely grant what Chriſtians have generally acknowledged, that there is an Influence of the divine Spirit ſtill communicated for aſſiſting Men of ſincere and upright Minds in the Knowledge and Belief of the Chriſtian Religion, and in the Practice of the Duties there required. Nor is there any thing in this, but what is perfectly agreeable to right Reaſon, and the juſteſt Notions we can form both of Man's preſent Weakneſs and Infirmity, and of the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs; provided we take this along with us, that theſe gracious Aſſiſtances are communicated in a way perfectly agreeable to the juſt Order of our Faculties, and without offering Violence to the Freedom that belongs to us as reaſonable Creatures, moral Agents, and ſo as not to render our own Endeavours needleſs, but to aſſiſt and animate our Endeavours *. And it is manifeſt, that ſuch is the Repre-

* That God can communicate his gracious Aſſiſtances to the human Mind in a manner perfectly well accommodated

Repreſentation made to us in the ſacred Writings of the Influence of the Holy Spirit, ordinarily communicated to Chriſtians.

The Author produces ſome Paſſages to ſhew, that Believers are repreſented as the *Temples* of God, and as having his Holy Spirit *dwelling* and abiding in them. Theſe are noble Paſſages, which do honour to the ſacred Writings. They are full of Conſolation, and capable of being improved to the moſt excellent Purpoſes. For what can be a greater Encouragement, or a more powerful Incentive to the Practice of Virtue, than to be aſſured that God is graciouſly preſent with good Men, ever ready to aſſiſt, guide, and comfort them by his Spirit? But then it is extremely evident, from the whole Tenour of the Scriptures, that this is ſuppoſed to be ſuch a

modated to our Nature, and ſo as to leave us the juſt Exerciſe of our own Reaſon and Freedom, no Man that has a right Notion either of God or Man can reaſonably doubt; and it can as little be doubted that it is agreeable to his Goodneſs to do ſo. And if we cannot diſtinctly explain the manner of this divine Influence, which is chiefly diſcernible in the Effects, (and I readily grant this Author, that our Saviour ſeems to intimate this in the Texts produced by him, *p.* 107, 108.) he muſt be a ſmall Proficient in Philoſophy, that would look upon this to be a ſufficient Objection againſt the Reality of it. Since no Man that has ſearched into the Nature of Things needs be told, that there are many Things the Certainty of which cannot reaſonably be doubted, tho' the manner of their Exiſtence and Operations be what we are not able to explain. And this particularly is the Caſe with regard to God's providential Concourſe with his Creatures.

a Preſence and Influence, as not to exclude the Uſe of proper Means on our parts, or the Exerciſe of our own rational and moral Powers. So when the *Spirit* is repreſented as *witneſſing with our Spirits*, which is another Paſſage referred to by this Writer; the very Manner of Expreſſion plainly ſhews that the Concurrence of our own Spirits, the Exerciſe of our own Reaſon and Conſideration is neceſſarily ſuppoſed. And in like manner when St. *John* ſaith, that *he that believeth on the Son of God hath the Witneſs in himſelf*, 1 John v. 10. this is not deſigned in oppoſition to all outward Teſtimony. For he begins his Epiſtle with putting thoſe, to whom he writes, in mind of the Teſtimony of him and the other Apoſtles concerning the Things they had heard and ſeen, as what had a great influence in engaging them to believe. Nor does it by any means exclude rational Arguments and Evidence. All outward Helps and Means are taken in, in order to the producing that inward Witneſs or Teſtimony in a Man's own Breaſt, which is then eſpecially completed, when beſides the external Evidences and Atteſtations given to the Truth of Chriſtianity, the Believer has a ſtrong Senſe and Perception of the great Excellency of the Religion of *Jeſus*, and of the Characters of divine Wiſdom, Goodneſs and Purity ſhining forth in it, and feels its happy Influence upon his own Soul in purifying his Heart, and reforming his Life. Such a Perſon may not unfitly be ſaid to have the Wit-

neſs in himſelf; and ſurely this is perfectly conſiſtent with his having a rational Conviction of the Truth of Chriſtianity.

If Faith is repreſented, as this Gentleman obſerves, to be *not of our ſelves*, but to be *the Gift of God*, this is agreeable to the devout Language of the ſacred Writings, which teach us to aſcribe every good thing that is in us eminently to God, *from whom every good Gift doth deſcend.* Thus we are told, that it *is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleaſure:* yet it is evident, that this is not to be underſtood ſo as to exclude our own Endeavours. For we are at the ſame time exhorted to *work out our own Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* So we are to apply to God to *make us perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in us that which is well-pleaſing and acceptable in his ſight*; but it is manifeſt from the whole Tenour of the New Teſtament, that we muſt *give all Diligence* that we may *grow in Grace* and Virtue, and muſt uſe our utmoſt Care and earneſt Endeavours, to ſtir up our own Powers to the Performance of our Duty, and to cultivate and improve good Affections and Diſpoſitions in our Souls. In like manner, with reſpect to Faith, it is ſo the Gift of God as not to exclude the Concurrence of our own rational Powers, or the Uſe of proper Arguments fitted to work a rational Conviction in the Underſtanding. Chriſtians are exhorted to *build up themſelves in their moſt holy Faith*; and when they

they do not grow in Faith, this is ſtill ſuppoſed to be their own fault, and to be owing to the Negligence and Indiſpoſition of their own Minds.

With regard to thoſe Paſſages, where our Saviour declares, *No Man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath ſent me, draw him*; and *every Man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me:* And again, *No Man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father:* Not to inſiſt on the different Explications that have been given of them, let us grant that they are deſigned to ſignify the Neceſſity of a divine Aſſiſtance in order to a ſincere Belief and Acceptance of *Jeſus Chriſt*, iſſuing in a dutiful Obedience to his Laws, and a hearty Compliance with the Terms of the Goſpel-Covenant; yet ſtill it is manifeſt, that this divine Aſſiſtance implies the Uſe of proper Means and Endeavours on our parts, and the Exerciſe of our own Reaſon, and a careful attending to the Evidence that is offered. Our Saviour all along in his Diſcourſes with the *Jews* ſuppoſes there was ſufficient Evidence to engage Men to believe, and he fairly lays that Evidence before them; appealing to the Scriptures, to the mighty Works which the Father had given him to do, and the excellent Doctrine which he ſent him to teach. And thoſe who with teachable Minds received the convincing Evidence and Teſtimony that God gave to his Son, ſo as to be thereby effectually engaged to

believe and to obey him, might be properly ſaid to be *drawn and taught of God,* and to have *heard and learned of the Father.* And on the other hand, when our Lord declares concerning the unbelieving *Jews,* that it was not *given to them of the Father* to *come* to him; his Intention is not to excuſe their Infidelity by caſting the Cauſe of it upon God, but rather to aggravate their Guilt, in not receiving and attending to the Evidence and Teſtimony that the Father had given to him, which was owing to the bad Diſpoſitions of their Minds. For he every where charges their Unbelief upon their own perverſe Wills, and corrupt Affections, and their hardning their Hearts and ſhutting their Eyes againſt Evidence *. In which caſe it was juſt with God to give them up to their own Hardneſs and Obſtinacy.

Upon the whole, allowing all that can be juſtly demanded, that in the preſent Darkneſs and Corruption of Mankind a divine Aſſiſtance is neceſſary the more effectually to recommend Religion, and engage us to believe and embrace it, and give it its due Weight and Influence upon our Minds; which Aſſiſtance God is ready to impart to thoſe who humbly apply to him for it, and who are ſincerely deſirous to know and do his Will; this indeed is a very good Reaſon for our applying to God by Prayer for his divine Aids, as good Men have always done; but no Argument can be drawn from it to

* See Matt xiii. 15. John iii. 19, 20. v. 40, 44.

to prove, that it is needleſs for us to uſe our own Endeavours; ſince this divine Aſſiſtance is not intended to exclude, but rather to encourage the Uſe of proper Means and Endeavours on our parts. Nor doth it in any wiſe follow from it, that Religion is not in it ſelf a reaſonable thing. For all the Arguments and Motives of Religion are ſtill maintained in their full Force. And the gracious Proviſion God hath in his great Goodneſs made for aſſiſting our preſent Weakneſs and Infirmity by the Aids of his Holy Spirit, ſhould make us more diligent to uſe our beſt Endeavours to underſtand Religion and to practiſe it; in which caſe this divine Aſſiſtance will be an inеſtimable Advantage to us. But if by our Pride and Obſtinacy, and bad Diſpoſitions, we reject the Evidences of Religion, and reſiſt the Methods of his Grace towards us, this muſt greatly heighten our Guilt, and expoſe us to a more aggravated Condemnation. This Gentleman himſelf ſeems in Words to acknowledge this. How he can do it in conſiſtency with his Scheme, I do not ſee. But ſuppoſing the Account now given of the Nature and Deſign of this Influence to be true, what he ſaith on this head is juſt and reaſonable. That "the Tender of this Conviction, "however potent in its Influence, muſt yet de- "pend greatly upon the proper Diſpoſition of "our Minds to give it reception for its Effi- "cacy, and ſo far will afford ample Matter for "Trial and Probation." That "a rebellious "Oppoſition of the gracious Influence of the

"divine

" divine Spirit deſerves a ſevere Reſentment;" and that "with all Juſtice we may in that caſe " be call'd to a ſtrict Account for our Obſti- " nacy, Impiety, and Perverſeneſs." *p.* 63, 64. And again he talks of " a ſevere Reprehenſion " juſtly due to a rebellious Refuſal and Diſclaim " of proffered Grace;" *p.* 66. and of " God's " withholding Light from ſuch as chuſe to ſit " in Darkneſs, and by their Ingratitude and " Neglect have rendered themſelves unworthy " of all farther Sollicitations." Theſe Expreſ- ſions, tho' not in the Senſe intended by this Writer, contain awful Truths, which I heartily wiſh he would ſeriouſly conſider, tho' it is very likely he will not thank me for any Concern I can be under on his account.

Thus I have conſidered the Account this Gentleman gives of the Influence of the Holy Ghoſt, which proves nothing but his own Unfairneſs, and the great Liberties he allows himſelf in miſrepreſenting the Scriptures, and ridiculing the moſt Sacred Things. For no two things can be more oppoſite to one another than the *true Scriptural Account of this Matter*, and that which this Writer would put upon us as ſuch. The Influence of the Spirit, according to his Repreſentation of it, ſuperſedes the Exerciſe of our own Reaſon, and the Uſe of our own Endeavours; but it is evident, not merely from one or two Paſſages ſeparately conſidered, but from the general Courſe and Tenour of the New

New Teſtament, that the divine Aſſiſtances there promiſed are conſiſtent with the Exerciſe of our own Reaſon and Underſtanding, and are deſigned to take in the Uſe of all proper Means and Endeavours. The Spirit, as he repreſents it, renders the Scriptures entirely uſeleſs, and leads to a Neglect or Contempt of them *; but it is not the good Spirit of *Chriſt* that inſpires a Contempt of the Scriptures, which are every where referred to by *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, as of great Authority and Uſe, and are repreſented as *able to make us wiſe unto Salvation*, and to make the *Man of God perfect*, &c. According to his Account of the Spirit, it has no regard to the Miracles and other extraordinary Facts and Atteſtations recorded in the Goſpel, as of any Uſe or Significancy; but it is undeniably evident, that in the New Teſtament a great ſtreſs is laid upon theſe things, as illuſtrious Proofs and Evidences of Chriſtianity, and that the Accounts of them were written for this end and purpoſe, to engage us to believe. The Spirit communicated to all Chriſtians, if we may believe him, excludes all outward Teaching; ſo that we are not *to receive the leaſt part of our Knowledge or Inſtruction from one another*; whereas, according to the Goſpel, the Influence

* He calls the Scriptures by way of Contempt, *Manuſcript Authorities and Paper Revelations*; as if a Revelation loſt its Authority and Uſe by being committed to Writing. He may, if he pleaſes, call our Laws and publick Records, *Paper-Laws and Authorities*; but I queſtion, whether this would be thought ſufficient to deſtroy their Authority.

fluence of the Spirit does not render outward Teaching needleſs, which is all along there ſuppoſed to be of great uſe and neceſſity; and there is Proviſion made for its ſtanding Continuance in the Church for the Inſtruction and Edification of Chriſtians in all Ages. The Spirit, according to his Repreſentation, engages Perſons to believe at once, by a ſtrong and irreſiſtible Impulſe, without Reaſon or Evidence, ſo that Faith is completed in an inſtant. But in the New Teſtament, the Faith of Chriſtians is not ſuppoſed to be ordinarily begun and completed at once, or to be produced without any Reaſon that could lay a juſt Foundation for believing; but to be founded on ſufficient Evidence, and capable of continual Growth and Improvement. He repreſents the Holy Ghoſt as abiding with all Chriſtians as their infallible Guide, ſo as to preſerve them from *all Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition*; and to cauſe them to *think all alike* *.

According

* To ſhew that the Influence and infallible Guidance of the Spirit is univerſal, our Author produces that Text, *This is the Light which lighteth every Man that cometh into the World*, which has no relation to any ſuch infallible Guidance of the Spirit at all. The Evangeliſt is there ſpeaking of our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt*, that he is the *true Light, which coming into the World enlightneth every Man*, as the Words might be very properly rendered; which ſignifies no more than our Saviour himſelf intends, when he ſaith, *I am the Light of the World*. The Deſign of ſuch Expreſſions is to ſignify, in oppoſition to the narrow Notions of the *Jews*, who were for confining the Benefit of the Meſſiah to their own Nation, that he was deſign'd to be an univerſal Bleſſing; that he came to inſtruct and enlighten

According to which Scheme, it is impoſſible there ſhould be any Errors or Differences of Opinion among Chriſtians. Whereas in the Goſpel it is all along ſuppoſed, that Perſons may be weak in the Faith, tho' ſincere; that they may differ from one another, that they are liable to Errors and Miſtakes; and it is expreſsly foretold, that there ſhall be Hereſies among them.

I need not take any particular Notice of the Inſinuations he makes, *p.* 61. that the ſacred Writings are corrupted; a Charge which has ſo often been refuted and expoſed with great Strength and Clearneſs. And as to what he talks of, *p.* 62, 63. as if no Man could underſtand the Scriptures without a great deal of Learning and Criticiſm, and being well read in profane Hiſtory, it will be readily own'd that theſe are good Helps for a better underſtanding many Paſſages of Scripture; and it is our great Advantage that we have many ſuch Helps in our own Language, which the Unlearned may

enlighten *Gentiles* as well as *Jews*. He was to be *a Light to lighten the* Gentiles, as well as the *Glory of his People* Iſrael. This alſo is the Intention of that other Paſſage he produces, *the Grace of God which bringeth Salvation* (by which we are there evidently to underſtand the Goſpel of *Jeſus*) *hath appered unto all Men*; in which ſenſe St. *Paul* elſewhere declares, that the *Goſpel was gone into all the World*, and that it was *preached to every Creature which is under Heaven*. Theſe are ſtrong Expreſſions to ſignify, that the Goſpel is deſigned for the Benefit of all Mankind, that the Offers of it are univerſal, and that it actually made a wonderful Progreſs in a ſhort time thro' a great Part of the then known World.

have the benefit of. But the main Principles and Duties of Chriſtianity are ſo frequently repeated and plainly inculcated, that a Man of common Underſtanding may, without any nice Criticiſm or Acquaintance with Hiſtory, by a careful conſidering the Scripture, underſtand them as far as is really neceſſary for Faith or Practice.

This Gentleman having aſſigned what he calls *the true Principle of Goſpel-Evidence*, proceeds in the remaining Part of his Pamphlet to heap up many things without much order, to ſhew that Faith is not only not founded in Reaſon, but directly contrary to it; and that there is an *irreconcilable Oppoſition*, as he expreſſes it, *between the Faith of Grace and the Faith of Reaſon.*

The Proofs he pretends to bring of this from Scripture are very weak, and indeed ſcarce deſerve a particular Conſideration. Thus he argues from our Saviour's declaring that *no Man can receive the Goſpel except he receive it as a little Child*, which he explains as if Chriſt required that Perſons in order to their receiving his Religion ſhould be Children in Underſtanding; when it is manifeſt, that what he intends is, that they ſhould be like Children in Humility and Innocence, and a freedom from Pride and Ambition, and from carnal vicious Prejudices *. Thoſe Words of the Apoſtle *Paul* effectually obviate ſuch Miſconſtructions; *Brethren, be not Children in Underſtanding: howbeit*

* Matt. xviii. 3, 4.

beit in Malice be ye Children, but in Underſtanding be Men *. In like manner St. *Peter* exhorts us to receive the Word as *Babes*, but what he intends by it he himſelf explains, that it is a *laying aſide all Malice, and all Guile and Hypocriſies, and Envies and Evil-ſpeaking* †. And on the other hand, being *Babes* in reſpect of Knowledge, or *unſkilful in the Word of Righteouſneſs*, is repreſented as a Fault in Chriſtians, for which they are reproved ‡.

If the Apoſtle deſcribes Faith to be the *Evidence of things not ſeen*, this does not prove that there is an Inconſiſtency and Oppoſition between Faith and Reaſon, though this Gentleman attempts to bring an Argument from it to ſerve his purpoſe, *p.* 77. On the contrary, it appears from this very Deſcription of Faith, that tho' the Object of it be *Things not ſeen*, yet Faith gives ſuch an *Evidence* of them (and the Word there uſed properly ſignifies an argumentative Evidence) as is ſufficient to ſatisfy the Mind of their Truth and Reality. The firſt Inſtance of Faith there produced is this, that by *Faith we underſtand that the Worlds were framed by the Word of God, ſo that Things which are ſeen were not made of Things which do appear.* ver. 3. And it is repreſented as the main Principle of Faith, that *he that cometh to God muſt believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* ver. 6. And in both

* 1 Cor. xiv. 20. † Pet. ii. 1, 2. ‡ Heb. v. 13. 1 Cor. iii 1, 2.

theſe Caſes, though the Things to be believed are Things removed from our bodily Senſes, yet the believing them is no way inconſiſtent with Reaſon, but perfectly agreeable to it. The other Inſtances of Faith recorded in that Chapter are high Inſtances of Truſt in God, and Reliance on his Promiſe and Faithfulneſs, his Power and Goodneſs, even in very difficult Circumſtances. But in none of them was Faith contrary to Reaſon. Our Author indeed would fain have the Faith of *Abraham* paſs for an unreaſonable one, becauſe it is ſaid, that *againſt Hope he believed in Hope*; the Meaning of which is no more than this, that he believed a Thing which ſeemed very improbable, and contrary to the common Courſe of Things: yet he did not believe againſt Reaſon; for as he had ſufficient Aſſurance that God had promiſed it, ſo he *was fully perſuaded that what he had promiſed he was able alſo to perform.* And there was nothing in this way of judging, but what right Reaſon muſt approve. See *Rom.* iv. 18, 20, 21.

Our Author thinks it a hard Caſe, *p.* 78. that *Zachariah* ſhould be ſtruck dumb for *heſitating* about a Thing contrary to the *common Courſe of Nature*; but ſuppoſing him to have believed that it was an Angel that came to him with a Meſſage from God, Reaſon ought to have led him to conclude, that it was a Thing not beyond the divine Power; and his being ſtruck dumb for a time, was both deſigned as a Chaſtiſement

tiſement for his Fault in heſitating, and as a Sign to himſelf and others too of the Certainty of the Event foretold. And whereas he alſo thinks our Saviour was in the wrong to reprove his Diſciples as of *little Faith*, becauſe they thought *they were going to be drowned when the* Ship was *ſinking under them*, and it would have been a *Sin againſt common Senſe to have thought otherwiſe*; it is manifeſt the Reproof was juſt. For if their Faith had been as ſtrong as in reaſon it ought to have been, conſidering the many illuſtrious Proofs they had ſeen before this of Chriſt's divine Power, they needed not to have been afraid of periſhing, when they had him with them.

When our Saviour ſaid to *Thomas*, *becauſe thou haſt ſeen, thou haſt believed*; *bleſſed are they which have not ſeen, and yet have believed*; he did not intend to pronounce thoſe bleſſed who ſhould believe without any Reaſon at all, as this Gentleman inſinuates; but he blames *Thomas* for not believing that he was riſen from the dead, except he himſelf ſaw him with his own Eyes; though he had Reaſon ſufficient to believe it, both becauſe he knew that it was what Chriſt himſelf had foretold and promiſed whilſt alive, and becauſe it was confirm'd to him by the concurring Teſtimony of thoſe who had ſeen him after he was riſen. So that our Saviour here condemns the Principle of thoſe who are not for believing a Thing, however well atteſted, except it be confirm'd to them by the

Teſtimony

Teſtimony of their own Senſes; which is the very Principle this Gentleman proceeds upon; a Principle perfectly unreaſonable, and which all the World owns to be ſo in every other Caſe.

He produces with great Pomp that Paſſage *Rom.* x. 6—10. *The Righteouſneſs which is by Faith ſpeaketh on this wiſe; Say not in thine Heart, who ſhall aſcend up into Heaven? (that is, to bring Chriſt down from above) Or, who ſhall deſcend into the Deep? (that is, to bring up Chriſt again from the dead.) But what ſaith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart, that is, the Word of Faith which we preach. For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteouſneſs, and with the Mouth Confeſſion is made unto Salvation.* I am not ſo clear-ſighted as this Gentleman, who ſees in this Text a full Demonſtration that the Faith required in the Goſpel is not a rational one. To me the contrary appears here to be ſuppoſed, *viz.* that the Goſpel does not inſiſt upon impracticable Conditions, and that the Faith of the Goſpel is founded upon Evidence not very abſtruſe, and above our Capacity, but ſuch as is clear and obvious to a ſincere and well-diſpoſed Mind.

It would be more to his purpoſe, if it were true, what he alledges, *p.* 84. That "there is "no one Leſſon, that the holy Writings have "taken more Care to inculcate, than that of "denying our Reaſon to give our Faith Scope."

For

For a proof of this, he only brings one Text, and that he ſtrangely miſrepreſents. He aſks, "Are we not ſtrictly enjoin'd to *captivate Reaſon to the Obedience of Faith?*" And his Comment upon it is this, "*To captivate*, to "lay it under the moſt abſolute Reſtraint and "Prohibition, not to permit it the leaſt Opportunity or Freedom to exert itſelf, or interpoſe on any Occaſion whatever." The Paſſage he refers to is 2 *Cor.* x. 5. where St. *Paul* expreſſes himſelf thus, *Though we walk in the Fleſh, we do not war after the Fleſh. For the Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of ſtrong Holds, caſting down Imaginations* or *Reaſonings, and every high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Chriſt.* His Intention is not to ſignify, that what he taught was contrary to right Reaſon, or that when he converted Perſons to the Faith, he obliged them to renounce their Underſtandings, or to believe without Reaſon or againſt it; but his Deſign is plainly to ſhew the great Succeſs of his Miniſtry, in ſubduing all oppoſite Prejudices and Reaſonings; which he expreſſes by *caſting them down* and bringing them *into Captivity*, to carry on the Metaphor, becauſe he had compared his Miniſtry to a *Warfare*. But ſtill this Succeſs was owing to ſuperior Evidence, which carried a greater Conviction than any Reaſonings that could be brought againſt it.

Thus

Thus this Paſſage, which is only deſigned to ſhew the ſtrong and convincing Evidence, and the Proofs of a divine Power and Original whereby the Goſpel was eſtabliſhed, is uſed by our Author to ſhew, that the Faith of the Goſpel is contrary to Reaſon. And though there be no *Injunction* here at all of any kind, yet he improves it into a general ſtrict *Injunction* to all Chriſtians, *never to exert* their *Reaſon upon any Occaſion whatſoever.*

It is with the ſame Candour that he obſerves, that " the Scripture-Teſt and Standard for find-
" ing out the Spirit of Truth is no more than
" this: *Hereby ye ſhall know them—Every one*
" *that confeſſeth that Chriſt is come in the Fleſh*
" *is of God.* Now this is evidently what Phi-
" loſophers call arguing in a Circle, and begging
" the Queſtion. But in Faith it is a neceſſary
" Preliminary, He *that cometh to Chriſt muſt*
" *believe that he* is." *p.* 78.

Here he repreſents it, as if the Scripture propoſed to us to believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, without any Proof at all, but only the bare Word of thoſe that firſt preached and publiſhed it; and that the firſt Principle of Faith is a taking for granted the very Thing that is to be proved. Can any thing be more unfair and diſingenuous, when the Deſign of the whole Goſpel is to ſhew that Chriſt's divine Miſſion was confirmed by the moſt illuſtrious Evidences, and divine Atteſtations? And it is manifeſt, that in the Paſſages here referred to by this Writer,

all

all theſe Evidences are ſuppoſed. The Apoſtle *John* is here writing to thoſe who were already Chriſtians upon full convincing Evidence, and whom he ſuppoſes to be well appriz'd of the main Doctrines of Chriſtianity *. And to ſuch Perſons he might juſtly lay it down as a Mark or Teſt, by which they might diſtinguiſh thoſe falſe Prophets or Teachers, which he tells them were then *gone out into the World*, that they *denied* Jeſus to be the *Chriſt*, or *confeſſed* him not to be *come in the Fleſh*, whoſe divine Miſſion had been confirmed by ſuch ſignal Atteſtations, and convincing Evidences. For it is in all Caſes allowed reaſonable, when a Truth has been ſufficiently eſtabliſhed, to make uſe of it as a Principle by which to detect and expoſe Falſhoods.

Our Author, who has a knack of applying Scripture in a way that no Man but himſelf would have thought of, would fain extract a ſort of Proof that Faith is not a rational thing, from our being required to hold *the Faith, not in Unity of Underſtanding*, as he gloſſes it, but *in the Bond of Peace, and Unity of the Spirit*, *p.* 75. He plainly refers to that admirable Paſſage of the Apoſtle *Paul*, *Eph.* iv. 2, 3. where we are exhorted to *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*; a Paſſage that does honour to the ſacred Writings, and which is deſigned to ſignify that we ſhould be united in Peace and Love, tho' not in all things exactly of

* See 1 John i. 1, 2, 3. ii. 19. 21, 22, 23.

the ſame Opinion; concerning which ſee my former Letter, *p.* 19. He alſo inſinuates, *p.* 76. that the Apoſtle approves the Diſtinction between *Faith and Underſtanding*, when he affirms of the Caſe "of repeating Prayers in an "unknown Tongue, that we may *pray with* "*the Spirit*, tho' not with the *Underſtanding*." As if the Apoſtle's Meaning was, that he that pray'd with the Spirit did not himſelf underſtand what he pray'd; whereas it is extremely evident to any one that examines that Chapter, that the Apoſtle there plainly ſuppoſes, that the Perſon that pray'd in an unknown Tongue did himſelf underſtand what he pray'd, and was *edified* by it, but that if he did not interpret what he pray'd, others did not underſtand him.

He would alſo improve it as a Preſumption againſt the Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity, that not *many wiſe Men after the Fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called*, p. 79. and he frequently obſerves, that the firſt Publiſhers of it were *illiterate Perſons, no Proficients in any Science.* And probably, if many of the firſt Publiſhers of Chriſtianity, or the firſt Converts to it, had been Perſons of Eminence for Riches and Power, and for their Station in the World, or had been great Philoſophers, renowned for Learning and Eloquence, thoſe who now affect to deſpiſe Chriſtianity for the Meanneſs of thoſe who firſt publiſhed and embraced it, would have regarded this as a ſtrong Preſumption,

ſumption, that the Chriſtian Religion was a Contrivance owing to the Genius and Policy, or Intereſt of its firſt Publiſhers; and that the Progreſs it made was to be attributed to theſe Advantages. But it pleaſed God in his Wiſdom ſo to order it, as to leave no room for Pretences of this kind. The Character and Circumſtances of thoſe that were firſt employ'd in publiſhing the Goſpel, afford a convincing Argument, that the Religion they publiſhed was not of their own Invention, nor was the Succeſs they met with owing to human Power or Authority, or to their own Learning and Eloquence, or to any worldly Advantages, but to the Force of Evidence, and a divine Preſence and Bleſſing accompanying it.

But he urges farther, that "if Chriſtianity "had proceeded upon rational Principles, it "could never certainly have laboured under "all that Contempt in the eye of the "learned World, which it did." *p.* 71. And here he breaks out into a high Encomium of the Age in which Chriſtianity firſt appeared; that "Reaſon was then ſure to have the faireſt "play imaginable; never were her Friends, "the profeſs'd Searchers for Truth, more coun-"tenanced and encouraged; and the World "was never better diſpoſed to attend the can-"vaſſing things by Argument, if that had been "the ground they went upon."

It will be acknowledged, that at the time when Chriſtianity appeared, the Knowledge of

the Arts, Eloquence and Politeneſs, had ſpread conſiderably; and Men in general, it is to be preſumed, were better qualified for examining and judging, than in a leſs learned and civilized Age they would have been. And the Chriſtian Religion's making ſo great a Progreſs as it did, in ſuch an Age as this, and in the *Roman* Empire, the moſt knowing and civilized Part of the World, is a Circumſtance very much to its Honour, more than if it had been at firſt preached among rude and barbarous Nations, quite uncultivated, and deſtitute of all Learning and Improvement. It is true, it did not meet with a ready Reception among thoſe who then took upon them the Name of Philoſophers; nor ought this to be turned to its diſadvantage; ſince there were no Perſons leſs diſpoſed for an unprejudiced Enquiry into the nature of this Religion, than they were. Some of them, as particularly the *Epicureans*, which was then the moſt numerous and prevailing Sect, denied a Providence, and ridiculed all Religion as Superſtition. Others of them, with the Scepticks, bent the whole Force of their Wit and Subtilty to ſubvert all Evidence of Reaſon, and ſhew that Truth and Certainty is not any where to be found. And with regard to the ſeveral other Sects of Philoſophers it may be obſerved, that they generally thought themſelves in honour obliged to ſtand up for what were looked upon as the diſtinguiſhing Tenets of their particular Sect, and the Dictates of their ſeveral Founders.

Such

Such Men blown up with a vain Conceit of their own ſuperior Wiſdom and Learning, would be apt to think it beneath them to rank themſelves among the Diſciples of a crucified *Jeſus*, or to receive Inſtructions from the firſt Preachers of Chriſtianity: Men not bred up in the Schools of Philoſophers, and who made no Oſtentation of their Learning and Eloquence. Any Man of common Underſtanding, and good Diſpoſitions, not liſted into any Party of Philoſophers, was certainly in a fairer way of judging impartially of Truth than they generally were. If therefore the Apoſtle warns thoſe to whom he writes, to *beware leſt any* ſhould *ſpoil them thro' Philoſophy and vain Deceit*; this Caution is very reconcilable with the Suppoſition of the Chriſtian Religion's being agreeable to Reaſon. And it is with great Juſtice that he pronounces concerning many of thoſe that were then called Philoſophers, that *profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe they became Fools: They became vain in their Imaginations, and their fooliſh Heart was darkned.*

If there were Perſons of eminent Parts and Learning, and ſtrong Reaſon, that were Enemies to Chriſtianity, both at its firſt Appearance, and afterwards, it may be juſtly preſumed to have been very much owing to their not taking pains to examine into that Religion, and conſider the Evidence brought for it. This may well be ſuppoſed, when ſuch Men as *Tacitus* and *Suetonius*, ſo exact in other matters, ſhew themſelves ſo ſtrangely negligent and ignorant

in what relates to the *Jews* and Chriſtians, and ſpeak of them according to popular Reports and Prejudices; without ever, as far as appears, giving themſelves the trouble to get any certain Information concerning them, or the Principles they profeſſed. And tho' *Pliny* with more Candour gives an honourable Teſtimony to the Probity of the primitive Chriſtians, yet it is very evident from the Account he gives, that he did not concern himſelf to make any diſtinct Enquiry into the Nature of their Religion, its Doctrines and Principles, or the Evidence that could be produced for it. This ſeems to have been the general Diſpoſition of the Heathens with regard to Chriſtianity; and no wonder that thoſe who were ſo negligent and ſuperficial in their Enquiries, did not embrace a Religion ſo contrary to that which was eſtabliſhed, and to their worldly Reputation and Intereſts. But yet it is certain, that there were many excellent Philoſophers, and other Perſons of Note and Eminency, that overcame all their Prejudices, and embraced the Chriſtian Faith, before it had the Countenance of the Civil Authority. Many of the ancient Apologiſts for Chriſtianity were Perſons of conſiderable Learning and Eloquence, and extremely well verſed in the *Pagan* Writings and Philoſophy *. And with regard to moſt

* *Arnobius*, who had himſelf been a rigid Pagan, and a Man of conſiderable Learning and Acuteneſs, and who turned Chriſtian, even in the perſecuting Reign of *Diocletian*,

moſt of them, it appears from the Accounts they give us of themſelves, that they had been ſtrongly prejudiced in favour of Paganiſm, in which they had been educated, and which had all worldly Advantages on its ſide: and it was by examining into the Chriſtian Religion, and conſidering the Excellency of it, and the Evidences brought for it, that they were convinced; and that at a time when they had the beſt Opportunities of enquiring into the Truth or Falſehood of the original Facts of Chriſtianity; and when, if there had been any Counter-Evidence to be produced, they might eaſily have known it; yea, and at a time when by embracing it they expoſed themſelves to the moſt bitter Reproaches, and moſt grievous Sufferings.

It was a thing ſo well known, that many of the Chriſtians were eminent for their Learning and Knowledge in Philoſophy, and had made an advantageous uſe of it in defence of Chriſtianity, and in refuting and expoſing the Pagan Superſtition and Idolatry, that the Emperor *Julian* thought it one of the beſt Methods he could take to ſubvert Chriſtianity, to ſhut up the Schools,

cletian, taking notice of the wonderful Progreſs of the Chriſtian Religion, obſerves, that Men of great Parts, Orators, Grammarians, Lawyers, Phyſicians, and Philoſophers, relinquiſhing the Sentiments in which they had been educated, embraced the Chriſtian Faith.——*Magnis ingeniis præditi Oratores, Grammatici, Rhetores, Conſulti juris ac Medici, Philoſophiæ etiam Secreta rimantes, Magiſteria hæc expetunt, ſpretis quibus paulo ante fidebant.* Arnob. adverſ. Gentes, Lib. 2.

Schools, and hinder the Chriſtians from Learning. This Gentleman indeed takes upon him to blame his Politicks in this, and could, it ſeems, have directed him to a better Method of putting a ſtop to the Progreſs of Chriſtianity, *viz.* by opening to the Chriſtians the Schools of the Philoſophers, *p.* 74. But whatever Opinion I may have of our Author's great Sagacity, I apprehend *Julian* and his Adviſers underſtood the State of things at that time much better than he; and were more capable of judging from their own Obſervation, what was the moſt likely way to effect a Deſign they had ſo nearly at heart.

I need not take any particular notice of this Gentleman's Declamation, from *p.* 70, to *p.* 75. to ſhew the Inconſiſtency there is between Chriſtianity and Philoſophy. It certainly argues a very peculiar degree of Aſſurance in this Writer, in the ſame Pamphlet in which he takes occaſion to mention the illuſtrious Names of Lord *Bacon*, Mr. *Boyle* *, Mr. *Locke*, and Sir *Iſaac Newton*, the greateſt Philoſophers of this, or perhaps any Age, to take upon him to pronounce with ſo much Confidence, that there is an irreconcilable

* This excellent Philoſopher, Mr. *Boyle*, has written an admirable Treatiſe, call'd the *Chriſtian Virtuoſo*, on purpoſe to ſhew the good Agreement there is between Experimental (*i. e.* the beſt and ſoundeſt) Philoſophy and Chriſtianity;——And what a Tendency a good Acquaintance with the former hath to diſpoſe a Man for receiving and believing the latter, and diſcerning and acknowledging the Force of its Proofs.

concilable Oppoſition between the Chriſtian Religion and Philoſophy, and that no Man can be a good Chriſtian and Philoſopher at once. They were Chriſtians that have ſet Philoſophy on the nobleſt Foundation, that have carried it to the greateſt Height, and enrich'd it with the moſt important Diſcoveries. And tho' he inſinuates, that thoſe of the meaneſt Underſtandings are beſt qualified for believing, and have moſt *of true Zeal*, and *Acuteneſs of Spiritual Diſcernment*, and ſeems willing to claim the *brighteſt Votaries of the rational Claſs* on the ſide of Infidelity; yet nothing is capable of a clearer Proof, than that the moſt diſtinguiſhed Names in the Republick of Letters, thoſe that have diſcovered the greateſt Strength of Reaſon, and Compaſs of Knowledge, have been Perſons that have ſhewn a high Eſteem for Chriſtianity. And it has been no ſmall pleaſure to me to obſerve within the compaſs of my own Acquaintance, that Men of the beſt Underſtandings, and moſt generous way of thinking I have ever known, as well as of the beſt Characters, and moſt exemplary Morals and Virtues, were the firmeſt Chriſtians. And I muſt confeſs it has given me ſome Emotion, when I have ſeen Perſons every way their Inferiors, no way remarkable for the Goodneſs of their Morals, or any extraordinary Strength of Genius, and that did not ſeem to give themſelves much trouble in cloſe thinking, aſſume a kind of Superiority, merely on

account of their pertly rejecting the Faith of the Goſpel.

There is one thing in his Harangue about the Oppoſition between the Chriſtian Religion and Philoſophy, which it may be proper to take notice of, to ſhew the great Conſiſtency of this Writer. He had in the former Part of his Letter repreſented Reaſon as in an eternal Fluctuation and Uncertainty; that the *Decrees of a human Underſtanding can in their nature have no pretenſion to be irreverſible*; and that the Philoſopher *cannot be certain of his own Conſtancy or laſting Attachment to any Principles*; nor that *his Judgment ſhall be inviolably fixed to one Point*; p. 25, 26. But here he repreſents it as the Character of a Philoſopher, that he *has contracted an inviolable Attachment to certain eſtabliſhed Teſts, and will hear of nothing that does not fall in exactly with what he calls the Laws of Nature, which he has already irreverſibly determined*; and that, he makes *moral Relations the Touchſtone for the Trial of all Truths*; p. 73. What he here offers, ſhews a great Inconſiſtency between this Author and himſelf, but none at all between Chriſtianity and Philoſophy; ſince it is certain, and has often been ſhewn, that the Chriſtian Religion is perfectly conſiſtent with thoſe Laws and Relations; and they that have treated thoſe Laws of Nature and Moral Relations with the greateſt Strength and Clearneſs, and to whom the World is moſt obliged on this head, have been Chriſtian Writers. This

This Gentleman takes occaſion in his Pamphlet to mention ſeveral great Men, and their Performances. *Stillingfleet*'s *Origines Sacræ*, Dr. *Clark*'s *Demonſtration*, &c. Mr. *Addiſon*'s *Treatiſe of the Chriſtian Religion*; *The Trial of the Witneſſes*; *The Analogy of Reaſon and Revelation*: And by juſt mentioning them in a ſneering way, has no doubt done enough to convince his Readers that they are very inſignificant Things, and that it would be loſt pains to conſider them. So extraordinary a Man is this Author, that one Daſh from his lucky Pen ſhall be of more force than all their learned Writings.

It is pleaſant enough to hear him expreſſing his Concern for the great Prejudice that is done to Chriſtianity, by the carrying on of *Boyle*'s Lectures, which he *cannot avoid* regarding as a *very principal Cauſe of the preſent prevailing Diſpoſition and Turn to Infidelity*; p. 85, 86. And I believe every body is convinced, that if this had really been the Caſe, this Gentleman would not have been ſo forward to complain of it. All that one can gather from what he ſays on this Subject is, that he and his Friends would be very well pleaſed to have thoſe Lectures laid down, which I muſt own with me is a very good Reaſon for their being continued, and a ſtrong Preſumption of their Excellency and Uſefulneſs *.

* As theſe Lectures are deſigned for the Defence of Natural Religion as well as Reveal'd, it ſeems, according to our Author, Reaſoning is equally an Enemy to both.

He declaims very rhetorically, *p.* 87——94. on the Inconſiſtency of the Gentlemen employ'd in carrying on thoſe Lectures, in urging Perſons to a free Examination and Enquiry; and at the ſame time exhorting them to embrace or adhere to the Chriſtian Faith, and ſetting before them the Guilt and Danger of Unbelief. He is pleas'd here to make Speeches for them, which, as he manages the matter, look odd enough; and it would be very eaſy, if any Man were diſpoſed to ſuch an Employment, to make a Speech for this Gentleman himſelf drawn out of the Principles of his Book, that would be much more inconſiſtent and ridiculous. The Principles upon which this Part of his Declamation proceeds, and on which the whole Ridicule is founded, are ſuch as theſe; that the being educated in any Religion, or baptized into it, abſolutely precludes all future Enquiry or Examination; that there can be no fair Examination, where there is not an abſolute Neutrality or Indifferency with regard to the Principles enquired into; and that all Examination neceſſarily ſuppoſes at leaſt a temporary Diſbelief; that whatever is propoſed to Examination or Enquiry may be innocently rejected; and that if a Man may doubt or ſuſpend his Aſſent for a while, he may doubt always; that no Man can without claiming Infallibility exhort another to embrace the Principles he himſelf judges to be true and important, or ſpeak to him of any Danger in rejecting them. Theſe are the Principles here

ſuppoſed,

ſuppoſed, and which he had laid down in the former Part of his Pamphlet. I have diſtinctly conſidered them in my former Letter, and ſhall not now repeat what I there offered. I ſhall only at preſent obſerve, that notwithſtanding this Gentleman's curious Harangue, it is obvious to common Senſe, that when a Man upon the moſt mature Conſideration is ſatisfied by Arguments which he judges good and valid, that ſuch and ſuch Principles are of great importance to the Happineſs of Men, and to the Cauſe of Religion and Virtue in the World, this muſt naturally make him deſirous both to confirm thoſe in the Belief of them, and in a ſuitable Practice, that profeſs to believe them already, and to bring over others to the Belief and Acknowledgment of thoſe Truths, by all the fair Methods of Reaſon and Argument in his power. If he looks upon thoſe Truths to be of great importance, on which much depends, he cannot but repreſent them as ſuch; and if he be a Perſon who has himſelf carefully examined, and upon an attentive Conſideration of the Argument has found the Evidence riſe up ſtrong to his view, it is natural for him to recommend Enquiry to others, in hopes it will have the ſame happy effect upon them. And if he thinks he has reaſon to conclude, that the true Cauſe of their not believing thoſe Truths is their want of conſidering them fairly and impartially, or that it is owing to vicious Prejudices and faulty Diſpoſitions of Mind; then it is very reaſonable for him to warn them ſeriouſly

ſeriouſly and earneſtly of the bad Conſequences of ſuch a Conduct, in a Matter that he looks upon to be of the higheſt importance. This a Man may conſiſtently do, without claiming the Privilege of abſolute Infallibility.

With regard to this Writer himſelf, any Man that thinks he diſcerns in his way of treating this Subject many Things very unfair and diſingenuous, and unbecoming an impartial Enquirer after Truth; many Things that argue a great Want of Candour, and a mighty Willingneſs to miſrepreſent and ſubvert Chriſtianity at any rate, tho' with it he ſhould ſubvert all Religion; any Man that thinks thus, (and whoſoever carefully conſiders the Tendency of this Pamphlet, and the groſs Miſrepreſentations with which it abounds, will be naturally led to think ſo,) might very conſiſtently, without pretending to Infallibility, admoniſh this Gentleman of the Unjuſtifiableneſs of ſuch a Temper and Conduct, and earneſtly recommend to him a more equal and attentive Examination of the Nature of the Chriſtian Religion and its Evidence; eſpecially conſidering the Declarations made in the Goſpel, concerning the Guilt and Danger of thoſe who, when it is made known to them, diſbelieve and reject it.

Our Author himſelf often mentions thoſe Declarations, but it is manifeſt, that it is only with a deſign to expoſe them, and Chriſtianity on the account of them. And in order to this, he puts the Caſe of Perſons continuing Unbelievers with the beſt Diſpoſitions in the World, after the fulleſt and

and moſt impartial Conſideration, and whoſe Unbelief is not owing to any Fault on their parts, but is abſolutely unavoidable and invincible. But this is not the Caſe the Goſpel puts. On the contrary, it is ſtill ſuppoſed, that the Unbelievers there condemned are ſuch as love Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds are evil; that their Unbelief is owing to faulty Cauſes, to vicious Prejudices and wrong Affections and Diſpoſitions of Mind, to their hardning their Hearts, and ſhutting their Eyes againſt Evidence. This is there ſuppoſed to be the general Caſe of Unbelievers; and their Guilt and Condemnation is repreſented as highly aggravated. If there be any particular Exceptions, they muſt be left to the Mercy and Equity of the ſupreme Lawgiver, but ſuch Exceptions could not be properly taken notice of in the Goſpel-Law. It would not be wiſe or fit, ſuppoſing a well-atteſted Revelation to have been really given from Heaven of great importance to Mankind, to put the Caſe of any Perſon's being excuſable in not believing or receiving it, when fairly laid before him. This would ſoon be abuſed; the believing and receiving it would be looked upon as a Matter of Indifferency, and ſo the Deſign for which that Revelation was given, would be in a great meaſure defeated.

The remaining Part of his Pamphlet has little in it that deſerves Conſideration. He declaims againſt the Methods made uſe of by Magiſtrates, and in the Univerſities, for promoting the

the Chriſtian Faith, and diſcouraging free Enquiry. *p.* 95——102. And if any wrong or miſtaken Methods have been made uſe of for promoting the Intereſts of Religion, which no doubt has often been the Caſe, I don't ſee that Chriſtianity can be made accountable for them, or by what Logick it can be concluded from thence that it is not a rational Religion. But I think it cannot reaſonably be denied, that ſuppoſing the Principles of the Chriſtian Religion to be beneficial to Society, tending to promote the Practice of Piety, Fidelity, Virtue and good Morals, and that Infidelity tends to ſet Men looſe from Reſtraints, and to encourage Licentiouſneſs, Immorality and Vice, a Magiſtrate that is perſuaded of this may very juſtly encourage the one by all prudent Methods conſiſtent with Liberty and the publick Rights, and diſcountenance the other. Nor can the Univerſities, that have the Care of educating Youth committed to them, be blamed for endeavouring to train them up by Reaſon and Argument, in thoſe Principles, which are moſt for the Good of their Country and of Mankind, and for promoting Religion and Virtue. The ſame may be ſaid with regard to Parents, that have any Concern for the Good of their Children. Nor can any thing be more abſurd than what this Gentleman inſinuates, *p.* 102. as if Parents could not breed up Children in the Principles of Religion, without arrogating to themſelves Infallibility. For if they had only a Probability

of the Truth and Excellency of the Principles of Religion, it would be their Duty to endeavour to inſtil thoſe Principles betimes into the tender Minds of their Children, and would be a very wrong thing to leave them at large in a World, where they are liable to be led into Principles and Practices of the moſt pernicious Tendency, without endeavouring to guard them by good Inſtructions againſt thoſe Principles and Practices.

It is not neceſſary to take particular Notice of the Quotations he produces with ſo much Pomp from Biſhop *Beveridge*; ſince whatever Eſteem we may have for the Learning or Piety of any particular Writer, if he has fallen into any improper Sentiments or Expreſſions, it would not be fair to turn them to the Diſadvantage of Chriſtianity, which is in no wiſe accountable for them. The Book from which our Author quotes theſe Paſſages was written when the Biſhop was very young, and it is not much to be wondered at if there are ſeveral things in it not well digeſted, and written in an unguarded and hyperbolical manner. But ſince in that Book he gives an Account at length both of what he believed and of his Reaſons for believing, it appears that he was far from looking upon the Influence of the Spirit to be, what this Gentleman repreſents it, a blind irrational Impulſe, or to be at all inconſiſtent with believing upon Reaſon and Evidence.

Our Author concludes his Pamphlet with recapitulating and applauding his own Performance, which I hope however will not have the Effect that ſeems to be intended by it. That Man muſt certainly be already very ſtrongly prejudiced in favour of Infidelity, who can be brought to think worſe of the Chriſtian Religion, for the Repreſentations he is pleaſed to make of it. He undertakes indeed to ſhew that *Chriſtianity* is *not founded on Argument*, but any one that reflects on the unfair Arts made uſe of by this Gentleman, and others that have appeared on that Side, and how little of ſolid Reaſoning they have been able to oppoſe to the Defences that have been made for Chriſtianity, will be apt to think, that it may with much greater Juſtice be ſaid, that *Infidelity is not founded on Reaſon or Argument*; and that if it ſpreads among us, which this Writer ſeems to glory in, though I doubt not he mightily exaggerates it beyond the Truth and Reality of the Caſe, it muſt be owing to ſome other Cauſe than fair and impartial Enquiry. Some have been prejudiced againſt Chriſtianity on account of the Ill-conduct of many of its Miniſters and Profeſſors, or of the Abſurdities that have been taught, and the Corruptions that have obtained among thoſe that call themſelves Chriſtians. But if this were all, a calm and impartial Conſideration of the Chriſtian Religion in its genuine Purity and Simplicity as laid down in the holy Writings, would be an effectual Preſervative a-

gainſt

gainſt this Prejudice. But beſides this, there is in ſome Tempers a ſtrong Affectation of appearing to be Perſons of ſuperior Genius, able to break through the Force of Education, and common Prejudices; and this I doubt not has carried many who were not able to diſtinguiſh themſelves to advantage by their ſuperior Virtues or Abilities, to endeavour to do it by oppoſing and rejecting the Faith of Chriſtians, and on this account aſſuming to themſelves a Judgment and Penetration above the Vulgar, as if they could ſee farther than the reſt of Mankind. But the moſt powerful Prejudice of all againſt Chriſtianity, and which has a much ſtronger Force to incline ſome Perſons to reject it, than any or all the Prejudices in its favour to incline Men to embrace it, is that which ariſes from the Byaſs of their corrupt Luſts and Paſſions. When Men are devoted to any of thoſe Sins, which the Goſpel forbids under the ſevereſt Penalties, they muſt either renounce the Scriptures, or condemn themſelves. A Man that is under the Power of ſtrong vicious Inclinations and depraved Habits, will of courſe be prejudiced againſt a Religion, which if it be true obliges him to counteract and mortify his darling Appetites, and will not ſuffer him to be eaſy in his licentious Courſes, and teaches him to expect a dreadful Puniſhment in a future State, as the Effect of his Ill-conduct in this. His Intereſt and Inclinations naturally bribe his Judgment to pronounce againſt ſuch a Religion,

they give force to every Objection, and will hardly admit him calmly to consider its Proofs. And therefore in an Age of growing Dissoluteness and Corruption of Manners, it is not very surprizing to see an Increase of Infidelity too.

On the other hand, a Man of real Piety and Virtue, one who is a devout Adorer of the Deity, who endeavours to govern his Passions, and is regular in his Life, can scarce help approving and wishing well to a Religion of such an excellent Tendency, that raises him to the most sublime Hopes, that gives him the most ravishing Discoveries and Assurances of God's rich Grace and Mercy, and of his wonderful Love to Mankind, and of the Glories prepared in a future State, as the Reward of a Life of sincere Piety and Virtue in this. I will therefore readily own, and let our Author make the most of this Concession, that a good Man will be apt to be prejudiced in favour of the Christian Religion. But then this Prejudice, if it must be called so, is a just and reasonable one. When a Man discerns the Characters of divine Wisdom, Goodness and Purity in the Gospel, when he feels its Suitableness to his own Case, the happy Effect it has upon himself in purifying his Heart and governing his Life, in strengthening good Dispositions, and ingaging him to abound in every good Work, this hath a natural Tendency to convince one of a sincere and upright Mind, that the Gospel is not the Work of Impostors, that it is worthy of God, and came

came from him. And it is a great Proof that the Chriſtian Religion is founded in Reaſon and Evidence, when it has both ſuch obvious Characters and Proofs of its Excellency and Divinity, as ſtrike the Minds and internal Senſe of thoſe who are not ſo well able to carry their Views through a long Chain and Series of Reaſonings; and when it is alſo confirmed by ſuch a Variety of Arguments and Evidences, as taken in a more extenſive View are capable of giving Satisfaction to thoſe of the greateſt Leiſure and Penetration. Theſe Reaſons and Evidences have often been repreſented to the World with great Strength and Clearneſs, nor do I find this Writer has offered any thing to prove thoſe Reaſons inſufficient.

I have now obeyed your Commands in communicating my Thoughts to you upon this Pamphlet, and have not left any thing in it unexamined, that ſeemed to me to deſerve Notice. And as this Writer makes ſome ſhew of treating the Subject he has undertaken in a methodical Way, I have, that he might not complain of having his Arguments mangled or not repreſented in their full Force, followed him in the Order which he himſelf has choſen. But tho' I will not deny him the Praiſe of Wit and Ability, yet upon the moſt impartial Conſideration of his Performance, I cannot help ſaying, that an Author that in any other Cauſe would give himſelf ſuch a Liberty of miſrepreſenting Things,

Things, and endeavour to impoſe upon his Reader at the rate this Gentleman has done, or that would treat any other Book as he has done the Scriptures, would be juſtly regarded, as having forfeited all his Credit and Reputation as a fair and candid Writer; and it certainly aggravates it highly, when it is done with a View to miſlead Perſons in a Matter of the higheſt Conſequence. If you think the Remarks I have offered may be of uſe, I ſhall not repent the Pains I have taken in them. I am with a real Eſteem

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